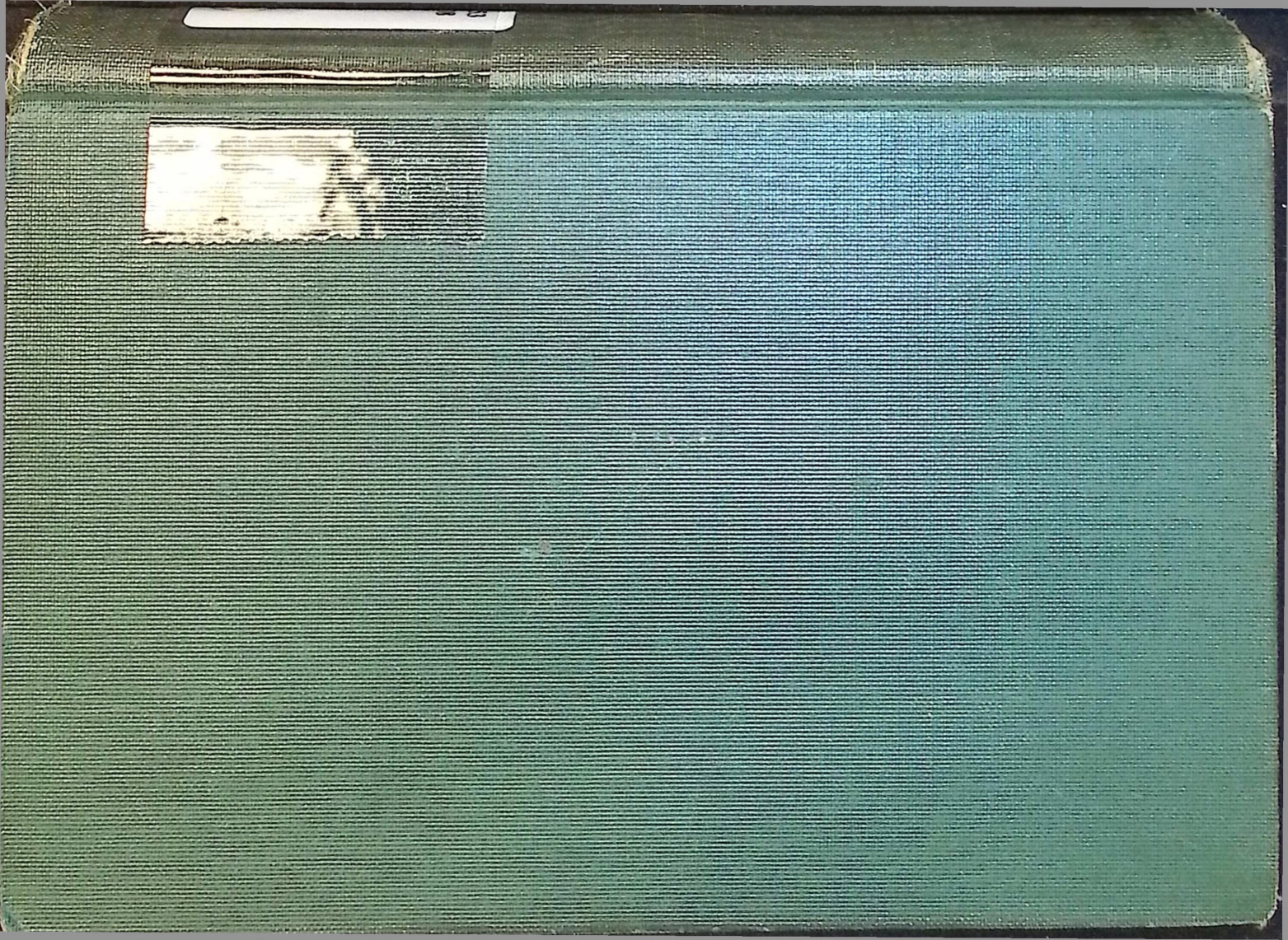
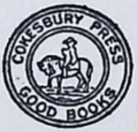


SERMONS FROM LIFE

By
CLARENCE EDWARD MACARTNEY
MINISTER, FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH — PITTSBURGH, PA.



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Foreword

THESE sermons are not spun theories of the brain, children of fancy or imagination, nor taken out of musty volumes, but Sermons from Life.

Although they are based on the great truths of the Bible, and illustrate the doctrines of the Christian faith, they have been suggested to me by the incidents of my own pastoral experience, that rich, stirring, and inexhaustible field for pulpit meditation and instruction.

The men and women who rise to meet us in these successive sermons are not dim specters, but of like passions with us; caught in the tides of life, buffeted and tossed, going down into the Gulf of Gloom, or reaching through faith the Shore of Safety.

Life! How ordinary and universal; yet how strange, thrilling, mysterious, tragic, sad, grand, and glorious it is! As we follow these souls through their struggles and trials and note their defeat or victory, we shall perhaps find something to warn us or encourage us in our own struggle with circumstance and with ourselves.

In each sermon I try to point the way to Him who came and who died that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly.

CLARENCE EDWARD MACARTNEY.

PITTSBURGH, PA.

Gift of First Presbyterian Church, Hendersonville, N.C. 10-8-75

Contents

		Page
	Foreword	5
I.	"I Believe Everyone Has the Right to Be Happy"	9
II.	"I Can't Let Her Go"	22
III.	"If I Had Only Known Then What I Know Now"	35
IV.	"I Want to See Life"	46
V.	Is Jesus Christ Real?	61
VI.	"Every Man Has His Own Ladder Down to Hell"	74
VII.	Beating Against the Bars	87
VIII.	"If I Had, I Would Not Be Here Today"	98
IX.	"There Is Something Missing"	108
X.	"It Was a Great Disappointment"	118
XI.	"I Beg to Remain in Sorrow His Mother"	134
XII.	"You Who Are Above Temptation"	146
XIII.	"The Tenth Hour Struck for Me This Evening"	157
XIV.	It Takes Tribulation to Make a Man	168
XV.	The Unpardonable Sin	182

XVI. "Do You Ever Pray About It?" . . 197
XVII. Alone 209
XVIII. "I Believe I Am Going to Hell" . . 222
XIX. "I Thank God Even Amid My Tears" 232
XX. "If I Had My Life to Live Over Again" 243
XXI. Religion and Trouble 256
XXII. "Since His Mother Died" 267
XXIII. "Can Christ Do Anything for My Sin?" 281

"He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul."

PSALM 106: 15.

I. *"I believe everyone has the right to be happy"*

I BELIEVE everyone has the right to be happy, and I propose to exercise that right." These words kept sounding in my ear as I stepped out into the night air and went my way. They were spoken to me by a woman who had been wretchedly unhappy, but who now was, or thought she was, on the road to happiness. In brief, her story was as follows:

Reading in my study on a winter evening, a man well along in middle life was shown in to see me. I saw at once that he was in deep distress and greatly agitated. I begged him to be calm and tell me his desire. He had married a woman much younger than himself, and for a time they had lived not unhappily together. Business reverses compelled them to break up their home. The wife, an attractive young woman of marked ability, secured a responsible position with a New York firm. Her

independence of her husband, her youth, her separation from him, and a growing friendship and affection for another man soon resulted in the old story, complete alienation from her husband. At length, his bad days in business were over, and now able to establish a home, he asked his wife to return to him. But the more he sought it the more she refused it. Her love for him was dead. But the more that became evident, the more fiercely burned his passion and devotion. He had besought, entreated, gone in person, sent messengers, and, as men in the lover's hell sometimes will do, made threats. But all of no avail. Now he thought of bringing religion to play upon her, not that he himself had been much of a Christian man; but, as many will do, fell back on religion to help him in his desire. He had heard that his wife spent some time with friends who had brought her to the church of which I was the pastor. Would I go and intercede with her on his behalf?

As soon as I heard his story I knew that there was no hope; but the manifest anguish of the man moved me to say that I would go and speak with his wife. I was courteously and even kindly received. After a somewhat delicate and difficult interview I asked her if I might offer a prayer on her behalf. To this she readily assented. When I prayed that she might be guided in the path of right and duty

and was about to leave, she thanked me for coming, but with great decisiveness affirmed her determination to have no reconciliation whatever with her husband, for whom she had neither love nor respect. "I believe," she said, "that everyone has the right to be happy, and I propose to claim that right."

When I had gone out, I found the husband pacing up and down the street in front of the house. I told him that the best thing for him to do was to accept the inevitable, that his wife's affection for him was dead, and, so far as I could see, there was no hope of a resurrection. Instead of permitting himself to be upheaved and distracted, I counseled him to patience, forgiveness, and faith. But as I left him and went my way, the sentence kept repeating itself in my mind, "I believe everyone has the right to be happy," and then I would say to myself, "Has he?" "Has she?" Months afterward, riding on a train to New York, a member of this family with whom for a time she had taken refuge, and in whose house I had interviewed her, handed me a clipping from one of the New York papers. There in brief words was the ending of the chapter, and a sad ending, too, in one of the New York hospitals. At once there flashed back to me her words, "I believe everyone has the right to be happy." Her golden apple had turned out to be only

an apple of Sodom, and had crumbled to ashes at her touch.

This young woman was caught in one of the most critical and difficult of all situations which can confront the human soul. On one side the strong urge for a happiness which seemed to be within her reach, and which, but for the incident and obstacle of a husband whom she neither loved nor respected, would have been altogether legitimate, proper, and innocent; and on the other side, the still small voice which spake not of happiness, but of duty. To escape from an unhappiness which, although real and intense, was purely circumstantial, that is, with no moral element in it, she reached out to embrace a happiness which had guilt in it, and therefore in the end proved to be not happiness at all, but misery. It is always better to be unhappy than to be wrong.

The Declaration of Independence is a political document, but in the Preamble we find a pathetic observation on this great yearning of man's heart, for it speaks of his right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, as if to acknowledge that all men can do is to pursue happiness. The desire for happiness moves the world and is the mainspring of our civilization. For happiness men and women are married, children are born, books are written, fields planted, homes builded, ships launched, merchandise bought and sold, pictures painted, statues

carved, battles fought, stars interrogated, and deeps sounded.

> "Oh happiness, our being's end and aim,
> Good, pleasure, ease, content, whate'er thy name,
> That something still which prompts the eternal sigh,
> For which we bear to live or dare to die."

Strange, then, with such universal seeking after happiness, there should not be more abiding happiness manifest in the world. The reason for this is that in seeking after happiness, after that good, pleasure, ease, content, or whatever you wish to name it, man fails to take into account the fulness of his being, and seeks to gratify one part of his nature at the expense of another.

In 1791 the Academy at Lyons offered a prize for the best essay on the subject, "What Truths and Sentiments Is It Most Necessary to Impress Upon Men for Their Happiness?" Among the contestants was a young man of whom the world would shortly hear much, the young Napoleon. Napoleon's essay is full of truth and elevated ideas, and particularly interesting is what he has to say about ambition, how it caused Alexander the Great to conquer and ravage the world without being able to satisfy it; how it guided Cromwell to rule England, but tormented him with all the daggers and furies; and how the ambition of Charles V, Philip II, and

other rulers, is, like all disordered passions, a violent, unreflecting madness which only ceases with life, a conflagration fanned by a pitiless wind which does not end till it has consumed everything. There Napoleon the youth pleads with Napoleon of the future. As for happiness, he commences his essay by saying that happiness is the enjoyment of a life which is most suited to our organization. But our organization is twofold — animal and intellectual. This is a very sound definition, the gratification of the natural desires are good for man, for they are a part of his organization; but man is more than body. He therefore cannot have happiness without enjoying the life that is best fitted for the soul, the highest part of his nature. Since man is a moral being, the effort after happiness must not violate the conditions of man's moral nature, for when that is done, misery follows. This being the case, life is rather a place of preparation for the highest happiness than a place for its enjoyment, and in this life our chief business is to seek first the Kingdom of God.

Our moral test in this life consists in our being placed in a situation where we have an opportunity to gain that which we desire, but at the cost of a violation of the necessities of our moral nature. It is in that test that we so often succumb. The unfortunate young woman of our story is an example.

Her situation was all the more difficult in that she not only had the natural desire for happiness, but was already unhappy, and wretchedly so, in her present relationship. She sought not only to gain happiness, but to escape from a position of bitter unhappiness; with what result we have seen. She escaped from the bonds of a former unhappiness only to fall into a worse unhappiness that had guilt as well as pain in it. There are thus two kinds of unhappiness: that which is accidental, brought on independently of any decision of the will, and involving no moral question, and that which is self-created, self-chosen, and full of woe for the soul of man. Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward, and many are the thorns which infest the path of man. But the sharpest and most deeply wounding of all is that of the penalty upon evil. One might suffer from some painful malady, and in that sense, and because of physical conditions, be unhappy. But it would be an unhappiness with no moral element of condemnation in it. Or one might be made unhappy by the actions or the injustices of another person, for fragile indeed is the house of our peace, and no man liveth unto himself. But when one is tempted to do evil, and yields to that temptation, and that possibility is before us all, one cannot avoid being afflicted with remorse and sorrow and, therefore, being unhappy, only in a far deeper and wretched state of

unhappiness than that caused by sickness or any form of bodily suffering, or any suffering or pain of the mind or heart caused by the actions or attitude of another.

A kind and virtuous mother, let us imagine, has two sons, one of them kind, obedient, thoughtful; the other, unfilial, cruel, and vicious. The mother falls ill, and messages are sent to the absent sons. The dutiful and obedient son is at a great distance, and during the long journey to his mother's bedside he is racked by the pains of suspense. The train is filled with interesting people and passes through lovely country. But the man is distressed and unhappy because he is fearful lest his mother should die before he reaches her side to receive her blessing. In memory he dwells upon her thousand kindnesses and shrinks from facing that hour when he will mourn as one that mourneth for his mother. Great, I say, is that man's unhappiness. But not so great as that of the unworthy son, whose mind as he stands by his mother's side is tortured, not by the pains of suspense, nor by the fear of bereavement, but by a remorse which cuts him like a knife as he looks down upon the face that his follies had helped to line with care, and the hair his sins had whitened. He, too, is unhappy, but it is the harder to endure because it is a moral unhappiness, the unhappiness issuing from guilt and sin. Perhaps we might say

that while one was unhappy, the other was miserable. "Happiness," said Pascal, "is neither out of us nor in us. It is in God."

This was what Jesus meant when he said, in so many ways, and with such deep earnestness, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." He warned men against the fatal mistake of deferring their moral welfare until they had secured their physical desires. First, always first, the Kingdom of God. Any sacrifice, he said, of the lower happiness for the higher was worth while. If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out; if thy right foot, or thy right hand, cut it off, rather than be cast into a hell of misery. No matter how strong our desire for a given object may be, or how burning the temptation, if it can be secured only by the sacrifice of the rights of the soul, it is a poor bargain. Esau, when he sold his birthright for the mess of pottage and got in return only lamentation and regret; Gehazi, when he lied for the sake of Naaman's gold and treasure, and got only leprosy in return; Judas, when he sold his master for thirty pieces of silver and got only the ridicule of the Scribes and Pharisees and the reproach of his conscience and despair of soul in return—all found it to be so.

The words of our text, "He gave them their re-

quest, but sent leanness into their soul," is a reference on the part of the Psalmist to the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. On the wilderness journey the people had been saved from starvation by the manna which fell for them from heaven. But they began to weary of it and lusted for the fleshpots of Egypt, saying: "Who shall give us flesh to eat? Our soul is dried away. There is nothing but this manna to look upon." The answer of the Lord to this complaint and ingratitude was to give them for a judgment that for which they had asked. A wind blowing in from the sea covered the ground about Israel's camp with quails. For a night and two days the greedy, flesh-lusting people gathered the quails and ate them; but while the flesh was yet between their teeth God smote the people with a great plague. The place where the victims of the plague were buried was called the Graves of Lust. God let them have quails for which they asked, but with them he sent the plague. The Psalmist's inspired comment on that bit of Hebrew history is this, "He gave them the desire of their heart, but sent leanness into their soul."

This part of Israel's history is ever being repeated. Men ask for this or that and cry for it, even at the expense of right and character, and when, in spite of the warnings of conscience, they insist upon having their desires, God removes himself from

them as a counselor and friend, and waits to judge the soul. The lower sense is gratified, but the higher spiritual nature is shriveled. The flesh is fed, but the soul is starved. He sent leanness into their souls. God's judgments always fall upon the central thing in man, the soul. The world is strewn with these graves of lust. There are more, far more moral and spiritual cemeteries and graveyards than there are cemeteries for the body; and the hosts who die of moral plague because they have gained this or that by the sacrifice of right exceed the number of them that are carried forth each day to be buried in the cemeteries where the snow covers the graves tonight. A cemetery where the dead are buried is a dark and cold place; yet not altogether so. The hand of Christian faith swings the lantern of hope in the darkness of the grave, and love whispers of a tomorrow where love shall find its own, when the trumpet shall sound and the sea shall give up its dead and the grave hers; but in the moral cemetery, where men's characters and souls are buried, there is no light and no hope, for there are the graves of dead, and forever dead, hopes, ideals, joys, innocence.

Seek first, then, the Kingdom of God. Never for a moment consider happiness at the cost of truth, honor, justice, purity, or a defiled conscience. The Bible has very little to say about the happy man,

but a great deal to say about the *blessed* man, and when it does call a man happy, it means he is blessed. The blessed man, and therefore the happy man, is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scorner, but his delight is in the law of the Lord. The Bible commences with the eternal fact of Eden and its temptation. When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat. In the struggle between the natural desire and the command of God, she chose the former, and the result was a lost Eden. Their eyes were opened, opened, as Milton says, "to good lost and evil got." The only Garden of Eden is that of loyalty to the highest and obedience to God. Stay in Eden, for when you once get out of it, it is as difficult to find the way back as it was for our first parents, who found the way barred by cherubims and a flaming sword.

I cannot conclude, however, with the light which flashes from that flaming sword of remorse and retribution, a light in which we read the name of our lost Eden and the judgment upon our folly. It is with another light blazing upon your path that I would leave you tonight, the light which streams,

not from the cherubims' avenging sword, but from Christ who died for sinners upon the Cross. For all those, and all more or less have so done, who have tried to seek happiness at the cost of some disloyalty to truth and right and have won only unhappiness of soul, let me say that happiness of soul can be won back in just one way: not by forgetting, not by going further from God, but by repentance. Let the unrighteous man forsake his thoughts and return unto the Lord, for he will have mercy, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. Christ said, "There is joy among the angels of heaven over one sinner that repenteth." Yes, I have no doubt that is true; and great must be the jubilation of the angels when they see the triumphant effects of Christ's death for sinners. But there is another place, too, where there is joy, and that is in the heart of him who repents and is saved.

"God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able." 1 CORINTHIANS 10: 13.

II. *"I can't let her go"*

"I CAN'T let her go!" It was his answer to my suggestion and advice, which he had sought. The words were spoken, not defiantly or impetuously, but slowly, quietly, and sadly. "I can't let her go." It was not so much the words that impressed me, as the way he uttered them. It was the expression in his face, the accent of his voice.

It was one of those tangled webs which human love and human sin are always weaving. He had conceived an infatuation and established a relationship which was wrong, contrary to the laws of man and forbidden by the laws of God. It could have no other eventuation than guilt and misery. Indeed, the misery was already apparent. That was why I told him that there was but one thing for him to do: break off the relationship and abandon the companionship. To this proposal he made the answer of our subject, "I can't let her go."

Let none speak contemptuously of his weakness. Who art thou that judgest thy brother? Consider thyself lest thou also be tempted. Wait until you are caught in a swirling and rushing tide of a similar affection. You, whose attachments and choices have always moved along conventional and legitimate desires and attitudes—wait until you, too, have been lost in this tangled wilderness, where what you want and desire and love, and what you ought, are set over one against the other and cannot be reconciled, before you point the finger of scorn at this man.

This thing had befallen the man in middle life, that period of life in which so many go down before the assault of temptation. Perhaps, if he had faced the issues before, or had sought advice before he had gone so far in his course, it might have been different. But he had not done that. There was no use, therefore, in going over the past with him. What he had written, he had written. The question was what to do now. He had gone far; but there was still something that could be done, much that could be avoided. The fact that he was troubled in conscience and sought advice in his procedure was evidence that he had not altogether acquiesced in the course along which he had been moving. While there is fight, there is hope.

He said it so deliberately and quietly, and with such an air of dismissing the subject, that I almost

began to feel that what he said was true, that it was impossible for him to break off this relationship and that his temptation was too strong for him. But judgment corrected at once the indulgence of sympathy, and I told him that with the help of God he could, if he would, do what he ought to do, and that to a moral purpose there is nothing impossible. Where there is a will, there is a way. It would mean a sacrifice, of course; it would mean pain and loneliness. The question was, Could he, or rather, Would he, make the sacrifice?

What I said to him, and what I now say to you tonight, is summed up in the words of our text, where men of like passions with us are warned against the power of temptation. "Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man. But God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

I. Sin and Yielding to Temptation Always Brings Sorrow, Pain, Misery

Where evil is done, someone is always hurt. This was strikingly illustrated in the case of the man of our text. Whichever way he moved now, someone was sure to suffer. If he followed the easy course

of obedience to his desires, conscience was sure to sting and goad and spoil what he thought of as his happiness. If he followed what was pointed as duty, as right, that, too, brought pain and loneliness to another. A man can get into a situation where even to do right causes pain and suffering.

This man was groping for some way which would lead him out of his difficulties, and there was a way, but even that way was rugged, hard, steep, and lonely. The way of the transgressor is hard. Nothing is more familiar than that sentence, yet nothing is so dramatically illustrated in life, and yet, strange to say, no truth so often ignored and set aside. Generations of evildoers have not been able to discover how to make the way of transgression easy. The time to chart the course of life is not when one is caught in the winds or tides of desire and temptation, but in moments of calm deliberation, when one can face without excitement the facts, the great moral facts which underlie human life. Must this great truth, this solemn truth, that sin brings suffering, be learned only by experience? In the vast majority of lives this would seem to be so. But why must it be so? Why will not the experience of others suffice to instruct and warn us? It is better to look forward, and, were it possible, exaggerate the perils which beset our journey through life, than to look back and wonder how we fell a victim to them.

II. The Power, Danger, Subtlety, and Universality of Temptation

The sun never sets on temptation. The drumbeat of its battalion follows the sun on its course around the earth. It is as old as the first man and as new as the babe that did but yesterday suspire. In the midst of the Garden of Eden, at the very center of the Garden, where all paths converged, where the man and the woman would always see it, grew the Tree of Life, the Tree of Temptation. Temptation is as unavoidable for us as it was for the first man and woman. Whatever path we follow, our path, we can count on it, must lead us through the garden of testing and temptation. The new-born Hercules found serpents in his cradle for him to strangle. That is a picture of life. Temptation is common to man. It is as characteristic of man as thought, or ambition, or love. The untempted man would be a curiosity.

It is safe to say that every person meets someone in life who will try to ruin him. Neither one may be altogether conscious of that purpose, neither the tempted nor the tempter; yet it is so. Christ told Peter that Satan desired to have him that he might sift him as wheat. We all meet, one by one, our triers and tempters, and those circumstances of life which will endeavor to take from us all that is

worthy and leave only the worthless dross and chaff. What is more melancholy, what is sadder than a once fine life and spirit now only dross and chaff!

Suddenly and without warning strikes the moment when the voice begins to speak within one's breast—"Rise up, kill, and eat. What you desire is thine. What are the sanctions of right and wrong? What are fears and hopes to you? Brave Heaven and Earth and Hell and have what you desire." What happens after that voice speaks may be described as man going down into the darkness and the silence and the place of despair, or rising to have fellowship with the stars of heaven. This warning, and also this encouragement, of our text comes just after the apostle had made a brief survey of the history of Israel. He cites their remarkable privileges and opportunities, the miracles which preserved them, the voices which spake to them, and yet adds that in spite of all these spiritual advantages only a few did not fall into the sin of idolatry. He says this record of the Old Testament is not a mere bit of history, but written for our warning and our admonition today; and that warning is to take heed and beware of temptation. Even the man who thinks he is safest had better examine himself. Those who feel that they might be tempted to commit certain sins, but say, that as for certain other sins, that would be out of the question—perhaps they

would do well to be on their guard, especially against those sins of which they think themselves incapable. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall"; or, in the words of the Old Testament, "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that layeth it aside."

"My soul be on thy guard,
Ten thousand foes arise;
A host of sins are pressing hard
To draw thee from the skies."

Every morning, remember that you are going forth to a battle field; and if you think anything of the value of your soul, you will do well to kneel down for a moment and ask God that you shall go through that battle unwounded and undishonored. No one ever lost anything by a prayer like that. Many have lost everything simply because they failed to make it.

III. The Limits of Temptation and of Sin

1. *The limits of temptation.* In the text there is not only a word of warning, "Take heed," but also a word of encouragement, and that encouragement is that the temptations to which we are subjected are temptations which we can bear if we will. Another translation of this expression, "common to man," is, "such as man can bear." "God," the apos-

tle says, "is faithful." If there are insuperable obtstacles in the way of virtue and salvation, then the whole thing would be a delusion. Whether or not a man is wounded, stricken, and smitten down by temptation, would depend then altogether upon whether or not he was assailed by certain temptations, upon fortune or misfortune in life, and not upon his own attitude toward temptation. But God is faithful. He does not ask you, a man, to bear the temptations of an angel. He submits, subjects you to temptation; but he gives you power to resist it if you will. Robert Burns once said, thinking of his own life:

"If I have wander'd in those paths
Of life I ought to shun,
As something, loudly in my breast
Remonstrates I have done;

Thou know'st that Thou hast form'd me
With passions wild and strong;
And list'ning to their witching voice
Has often led me wrong."

But Burns was not the only tempted man, or the only man with strong passions. Others with equally strong temptations and equally high passions have overcome their temptations through the power of resolve and through the grace of God. God would not be faithful if man were simply the plaything of

temptation and the target of evil. One wrote to me recently, and in the letter said: "We are all put on this earth to be tempted; but whether we are strong enough to avoid it, no one but ourselves can answer." There is a half truth in that sentence from the letter. We are tempted upon earth, whether we're put here for that purpose or not, and we ourselves decide what the issue of the temptation will be. But the statement has a false implication in it, to the effect that the tempted person may not be strong enough to resist it. If so, God would not be faithful. And whether or not a man falls before temptation, would depend altogether upon whether a shaft of evil strikes him in a vulnerable spot. God submits us to temptation, but provides a way of escape. Fate never bars that way. God opens the road; man must take it. Satan fights against us, but he fights in chains and shackles. The grand capacity of human nature to resist must be linked to man's will. In Bunyan's great dream of Mansoul, although that fortress and capital was besieged by strong, cruel, subtle, and malignant foes, the fortress could not fall, and did not fall, until its gates were opened from within. Not until you and I enter into conspiracy with the foe at the gate of our soul, can that enemy win the victory. We are able to bear it if we will.

2. *The limited power of sin to hold a man in*

slavery. We have been talking about the limited power of temptation. But what if temptation has struck a man down? Can that man arise? *If he will, he can*. The man of our sermon, with whom I commenced, belongs more to this second class, whom we shall now discuss, that is, those who have been wounded or bound by temptation. He said to me, when I merely repeated what his own conscience told him he ought to do, "I can't give her up." What he really meant to say was that he was not willing to pay the price, that it would hurt too much. He was not happy in his choice, and yet he could not bear the thought of her being stricken from him.

As long as this man said, "I can't give her up," of course he couldn't do it. But when he says to himself, "I can," then for him in Christ all things are possible. The subtlety of the tempter is manifested, first of all, in the way in which he persuades his victims that what he asks them to do or incites them to commit is of no matter whatever, that there is no moral law against which man can sin. Then, when he has persuaded man to sin, tells him now, not that it doesn't matter, but it matters so much, so greatly, that nothing can be done to help him. A yielding to temptation may bring a feeling of weakness and even of despair. That is one of the tempter's plans to keep the soul in captivity. He had persuaded the man of our text to that effect.

The man knew that it mattered, and mattered much. He knew that there was no true happiness in the course which he was pursuing, but he had permitted the tempter to persuade himself that there was now no reformation or amendment possible.

"They say that poison-sprinkled flowers
Are sweeter in perfume,
Than when, untouched by deadly dew,
They glowed in early bloom.

They say that men condemned to die
Have quaffed the sweetened wine
With higher relish than the juice
Of the untampered vine.

And I believe the devil's voice
Sinks deeper in our ear
Than any whisper sent from Heaven,
However sweet and clear."

When we feel that evil is the only reality, that it is a greater and stronger reality than good, then our condition is hopeless. But the voice of God tells us that there is a way of escape. Words of Samuel Johnson in one of his essays are of a nature to stir the mind and heart. He says: "I think there is some reason for questioning whether the body and the mind are not so proportioned that the one can bear all which can be inflicted on the other; whether virtue cannot stand its ground as long as life; and

whether a soul well principled will be sooner separated than subdued."

A man once came to his physician, complaining of physical weakness and low spirits, and how he was tempted to rely upon stimulants. The physician told him that to resort to stimulants in his condition would be injurious. When the patient declared that unless he drank he would be unequal to his work and would sink, the doctor said, "Then sink like a man."

Avoid slipping or drifting into those relationships or conditions in which you can remain only with guilt and misery, and out of which you can escape only with pain. Let no glitter or whisper hide from you the fact that the way of evil is dark and hard. Avoid *drifting* into these conditions and these relationships, because, without realizing just where they are going, or what they are doing, by following the line of least resistance, letting the soft winds of desire blow upon them, men find themselves suddenly on the reefs of danger and destruction.

Call upon all the mighty God-given powers of the soul, first of all, to resist temptation even unto blood, striving against sin, as the apostle says; and second, even if sin has scarred and wounded you, rise again and say, as John Bunyan made his hero say after he had fallen in his combat with Apollyon, and his sword had slipped from his grasp, and he

seized once again his weapon, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; for when I fall I will rise again." When a man says, "I will rise again!" God and the angels are with him.

Be ready to pay any price for the liberty and purity of your soul. Remember what the Lord Jesus Christ said. Do you think that it hurts, that it's too hard to change something that ought to be changed, to give up a habit, an appetite, a relationship, a friend, as this man was asked to do, but said he could not? Remember, then, those words of Jesus: "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee. If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, for it is better to go maimed into the kingdom of heaven than with thy whole body to be cast into hell."

In all your plannings and in all your struggles, lay hold upon that great companion and helper of the soul, the Lord Jesus Christ. Ask him, for he has promised he will do it, to strengthen you in your battle. And should any of my readers have fallen before temptation, then ask him who is not only the great Guide and Admonisher, but the sympathizing Helper and Redeemer and Rescuer, to lift you up again, and with his own precious blood to wash you clean from the guilt and stain of sin.

great student, or a great traveler, or has come in contact, as a minister or a physician, with mankind and its needs. No; we mean that he has seen by personal experience much of the gay and worldly side of life, perhaps even the sordid side of life. And when we say those words, "He has seen a great deal of life," they are spoken with the accent of implication that he, better than most men, knows how empty and vain that sort of life is.

Taking the word of this young woman, words soon lost on the night air, and yet echoing now and then in memory, as a starting point, I would like to show, first of all, the utter nothingness and inadequacy and sham and mockery of life as she thought of it when she said she wanted to "see life." And then, on the other hand, to show the everlasting value of life lived not for time, but for eternity, life lived according to the precepts and example of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. The Sham and Worthlessness and Mockery of Life That Is Lived for Pleasure and for Self

We are here in this world, and, rightly conceived, to see life at its highest and utmost is a laudable ambition. But to see life in the sense of casting off the restraint of custom and morality, in the sense of seeking always pleasure and delight and self-

gratification, that is a dangerous ambition, and one which is sure to come to a climax in disillusionment and bitterness. The Prodigal Son in the parable of Jesus had become tired of the limitations and restraints of his home. Life there seemed to him ordinary and humdrum. Life outside, the great city, where men and women met, that must be the real life. So he said to his father, "Give me the goods; I am going to see life." He was impatient to be off, and soon in rapid succession he began to see life. He saw it in city after city, in the face of harlot after harlot, in the intoxication of cup after cup, in the excitement and delirium of the gambler's chance. Life moved rapidly, and he with it, until at length this man who said, "Give me the goods; that's all I want out of you and out of this home; I am going to see life"—the man who said that found himself in rags, in want, and so hungry that he actually envied the swine which he was tending their diet of husks of corn. Never was such a graphic picture so quickly drawn, so accurately drawn, so vividly drawn of the sure disillusionment, disappointment, bitterness, and disenchantment of that man or that woman who sets out with the one purpose to "see life." It is always the same. This man is timeless; he belongs to every age. He is raceless; he belongs to every race. You can find him in Pittsburgh, you can find him in Rome, you can find him in Athens;

you can find him yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Always the experiment has the same dismal ending. Husks will do for swine, but the soul cannot live on husks. The man who says, "I will see life; give me the goods; give me the things," has made the fatal mistake of thinking that he can satisfy himself with husks which the swine do eat. In a far country and among the swine, this man came to himself, a true and reasonable self, God-implanted, a self to whom harlots and drunkards and gamblers and joy-riders could say nothing at all, a self which the world could not create, could not take away, and could not satisfy. One of the most brilliant men in history, a great saint in the Church, tells us how he, too, set out to "see life," and in the grosser pleasures of the body, in the interests of travel, in the pursuit of philosophy, in the theories of the cults and schools of his day, only to learn that there was nothing there which could satisfy his soul. It was this Augustine, who in the very opening line of his great *Confessions,* uttered those words, so often quoted, but so full of meaning and beauty, so deep and true, that they can never be quoted too often: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee!"

One who comes much in contact with the official and social life of Washington recently said to me: "You have no conception of the tragedies of disap-

pointment and disillusionment, and bitterness and cynicism which are to be found here in Washington under the showy surface of political and social life." The nation's capital is a City of Disillusionment. There thousands go seeking place and power. Those who gain it discover that it turns to ashes at their touch and has nothing in it which can feed the soul. Those who are beaten and baffled in the pursuit are turned to bitterness and cynicism. How merciless the world is to those who worship it! How cruel it is to those who love it! It was the verdict, not of one who knew nothing about it, but one who by his own record had tried all its pleasures—women and wine, architecture and gardens, learning, pomp, and power—"vanity of vanities." That verdict of the Old Testament has an antiphonal answer in the words of the New Testament: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, the pride of life, is of the world; and the world passeth away and the lust thereof." The saddest sight upon earth is the man who has lived for the world and now his world has passed away, or rather, in the midst of the world, the lust of the world, his desire for the world, has passed, because he knows the world cannot satisfy him. And now he has no other world upon which

he can fall back. Speaking of some of his wealthy friends, a man once said to me: "They are trying to get more out of the world than there is in it." A true and searching comment that was. Trying to get more out of the world than there is in it! What he meant was that out of houses and horses, machines and estates, and pleasures and travels they were trying to extract the true and abiding delight of life. And all the time the higher satisfaction was evading them. That which they were seeking for was not to be found in that kind of life. A woman of rank and station, with the relics of a once great beauty, who was regular and faithful beyond nearly all others in her attendance upon church and the devotional services, said to me: "I have been all through the other; I know all about it! I know there is nothing in it." Christ called only one man a fool, and that was the man who planned his life for the things of the world, who thought he could get his delight and satisfaction out of those things. When he was suddenly called from the world which he worshiped, or when the world which he worshiped sank beneath his feet, Christ said, So is everyone who is not rich toward God. Get all you can out of life; see life in its high and true meaning; but remember that life is more than meat, and the body more than raiment, and that a man's life con-

sisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

II. The Life That Is Worth Seeing

I have spoken of that life which is not worth seeing, which, when seen, is nothing, and yet, to see which so many spend the precious substance and time of life. In the great Psalm the singer asks the question, "What man is he that desireth life and would see good?" He does not mean mere physical existence, but life in its highest sense. Then he goes on to tell men how they can see that kind of life. "What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it."

The Lord Jesus Christ was the great Author of the rule of living, and himself the great Example of how to live. He, of all others, saw life at its utmost. One has written of Beethoven that he had the capacity for realizing the fundamental character of life in its two aspects of suffering and achievement. Suffering and achievement—those two aspects stand out in the life of Christ. None suffered more; none achieved more. More of life can be seen in suffering and sorrow than in its sunlit hours. The bitter leaves of the fennel tree are to be found

in every goblet of life; but in that bitter taste is found the invitation to achievement.

What were some of the principles of this greatest of all lives—the life of Christ? In the first place, it was a life not for self, but for others. It is written of Jesus that he pleased not himself. This has become a trite commonplace of moral and ethical instruction. But when it is translated from oral discourse or written page into actual fact, it is never commonplace, but always fresh with the morning dew of beauty and inspiration. Life is made beautiful when a husband lives for a wife, or a wife for a husband, or children for their parents, or parents for their children, or friend for friend. But the great thing about Christ's sacrificial love was that it was bestowed upon the unworthy. The Highest gave himself for the lowest; the Worthiest gave himself for the most unworthy; the Sinless One died for the sinner. Christ on the Cross, with a thief on either side, is the eternal symbol and sign of life's sacredness and value. The one who said it, aside from Christ, had a better right to say it than any other man who has lived, "No man liveth unto himself and no man dieth unto himself." The life of Christ lived for others was one of far-reaching sympathy and tenderness.

"Life is mostly froth and bubble;
Two things only stand like stone—

Kindness in another's trouble,
Courage in your own."

The second principle of Christ's life was that it was a life lived not for the things of the world, but for the things of the soul. The English poet Watson in an essay on poetry said that it is the mission of poetry to reveal the dignity of life and the greatness of it. Here certainly Christ is the greatest of all poets. It is he who reveals the beauty and the sacredness of life. It is he who submits to us that great question in spiritual mathematics, "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Christ could say truly, The birds of the air have nests, the foxes have holes, but the Son of man hath not whereon to lay his head. Judged by the things that men "leave," as the newspapers say when a man dies, Christ was a very insignificant figure. But judged by the things of the soul, his life makes all other lives look like moral and spiritual bankrupts.

Dickens in one of his masterpieces, contrasts the death of a good, kind, charitable man who has lived not for the things of the world, but for the things of the soul, with the death of a hard skinflint miser. It is a fearful contrast, and yet a contrast which could be drawn from lives on every street in this city. Nothing seems so ephemeral, so conquered by the touch of death, as the hard, selfish, world-seeking

life; but even death, when it strikes its blow at the pure spiritual, unselfishness, tender life, succeeds only in releasing its beauty and its power. "Strike shadow, strike! and see His good deeds springing from the wound to sow the world with life immortal." The wounds of death in such a life are like the wounds upon the body of Christ: they are wounds which give an immortal power and influence to him who has passed out of time into eternity.

"We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths;
In feelings, not in figures on a dial.
We should count time by heart-throbs. He most lives
Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best.
Life's but a means unto an end; that end
Beginning, mean, and end to all things—God."

The life of Christ, in the third place, is a life which turned away from sin. Sin is the great shadow over our existence. It is sin which makes men hard and cruel and turns them against themselves and against their brother man. The Psalmist asks in his great Psalm for the man who would see life, and then he gives him his divine prescription and tells him how to see it. Among other things this—"Depart from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it!" Not political peace, but the peace that comes out of a life reconciled to God and the pursuit of good deeds. Some men think they are going to see life in the exploration of evil. Evil has sort

of a mystery about it. There is something in that hidden place, the deluded one fancies to himself, that will bring a satisfaction and a thrill not to be had elsewhere. But Christ said through the prophet of the Psalm, and illustrated it in his own life, "He that would see life, let him depart from evil and do good." The life which a man sees in doing evil is not life, but death. "There is a way that seemeth right unto men, but the end thereof is death." Always death! death to hope, death to happiness, death to ambition, death to innocence! Death!

The fourth great principle of Christ's life was its eternal implication. Most men live on the diurnal principle; that is, they live for the day. Christ lived on the eternal principle, for eternity, not only for this world, but for the world which is to come. He never acted or spake as if this world were the only one for him, and he never spoke to men as if his principles of life applied to this world only. Always Christ speaks as One who stands under the cope of another world. He contrasted the powers of this world and the powers of the world to come, and set over against one another the fate of a man in this world and his possible fate in the next world, and showed how a man could be rich and prosperous in this life, but bankrupt and miserable in the life to come.

Huxley somewhere protests against the great

words of St. Paul read by an English rector at the funeral of his child—"If the dead rise not, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." He took the position that even if there is no after life, there is opportunity for nobility in this life. But, as a matter of fact, Paul is right, and Huxley is wrong. The very idea of nobility in this life is a by-product of the world's faith in life to come. If this life is all, then "eat, drink, and be merry"; get the most you can out of it, in that animal, sensual way, for that is your real existence. But if this life is the training place for another life, then the wise man will live not for time, but for eternity.

One day I was called to a place which I have never visited before, and do not propose to visit again, unless it should be necessary—the morgue. Asking there for one whom I had gone to see, an employee of the court, I suddenly found myself in the chamber of the dead. Here, beneath the glass covering lay the sheeted dead, the real "unknown" dead; but with no poetry or flag or oratory or art to commemorate their death. The rolling, tossing sea of humanity and mortality had cast them up on the city's shores. Save that they belonged to the human race, no one knew who they were.

As I stood there I thought, What woman awaited thy coming with a thrill of expectation? And thou, What arms embraced thee in thine infancy? And

thou, What ambitious plans were sketched for thy career? What if that father's pride could have seen thee here? And thou, What love was lavished upon thee, and what kisses were bestowed on these now marble lips? Tell me something of your journey. What tempter led thee astray? What infidelity stabbed thy heart? What bitterness made thee life's enemy, and life thy enemy? What fair ideals once decorated the chambers of your imagination? What tears of regret have stained these cheeks? What sighs of remorse once heaved thy now passionless breast? Now life for thee in this world, with all its hopes and tears and transient joys, its sins and crimes, is all forever past, and the world looks upon thee through a window of glass.

The very place seemed to mock at life and all its sacred significance; but as I turned with a cloud of depression upon me to leave the place, I saw a printed sign on the wall which read as follows: "Gentlemen will remove their hats." All sorts of people, but most of them from the lower ranks of life, and even from the submerged life of the city, entered that chamber of mortality in search of a friend or acquaintance. All of them when they entered removed their hats. Why? Was it a tribute to these nameless ones, outcasts, criminals perhaps? No! not a tribute to them, but a salutation to life and its sacredness. Even these melancholy ruins were sa-

cred, because they were the fallen temples of the human spirit.

No sin, no crime, no passion can altogether strip life of its sacred meaning. If you want to see life as God gave it and Christ lived it, you can do so. See Life! Discover that no yielding to temptation and no lying down in sin is comparable to resisting it, that no surrender of self, that no indulgence of self is comparable to the conquest of self, and that where life is lived in purity, in tenderness, and in pity in this world, but as belonging to another world, there death has no empire and no dominion.

Strange thing, but deeply true, that it is a Dead Body which sets the everlasting seal on the divinity and sacredness of life. Is it a Body which has five ghastly wounds in it—his feet, his hands, and his side—a body not unlike that of the two criminals, each with four wounds, who hang at his side, save that on *his* head there is a crown of thorns. Those wounds of his are now concealed and shrouded in a clean linen cloth with which his friends wrap up his body, which they carry to the garden grave, where it is left, not forever, but to rise again and sow the world with Life and Light immortal. If you want to see life, see Him! See Him in the majesty of his deity, the pathos of his humanity, lifted up on the Cross that your sins might be for-

given, that your death might be conquered in Life Everlasting. He died that you and I might live.

"Thou wilt show me the path of life; in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore."

"Behold my hands and my feet that it is I myself; handle me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have." LUKE 24: 39.

V. *Is Jesus Christ real?*

SOMETIME ago I received a letter, the substance of which was the question of this morning, "Is Jesus Christ Real?" The writer of the letter had passed through deep waters. A member of a Christian church for many years, she had only recently awakened to the grand seriousness of the Christian life, the glory of the Christian promises, and the tremendous possibilities of life in Christ. She realized that Christ meets a great need in human life. The purity of his life, the perfection of his example, the sweetness of his companionship and the tenderness of his sympathy, the infinite pathos of his unmerited death when he took upon him our condign punishment, becoming our substitute before the law of God—all this to the writer of the letter now answered a great need of life and a great desire of the heart, and particularly the work of Christ as a Redeemer from sin, for in the life of

the writer there had been definite and specific transgression.

But now, just awakening to the greatness of the Christian life and the preciousness of his costly remedies for the hurt and stained soul, there rose this haunting and appalling question, "Is Jesus Christ real?" In the nineteen hundred years that have passed since he was seen on earth none has seen him. The records of his life and death have been transmitted to us from remote times. Many accomplished men, especially scientific men, make no recognition of his claims and question the truth of his biography. Many of his best friends deny him and betray him and live their lives as if he were only a pious imagination. His Church has been in the world for nineteen centuries, yet the world is still pagan and brutish. By the many he is still neglected and by the few enthroned. Even among some of those who are his ordained and chosen spokesmen, the chief and grand fact in Christ, how he makes atonement through his death for sin, is either omitted, or treated as if it were of little importance. Therefore she asks, "Is Jesus Christ real?"

Had she known it, her dilemma was nothing new and her question was a very ancient one. John Bunyan tells us how when he thought he was on the way to Christ he was assailed with doubt. "How can you tell," the tempter said to him, "but that the

Turk had as good Scriptures to prove their Mohammed savior as we have to prove our Jesus? Everyone doth think his own religion rightest, both Jews and Moors and Pagans; and what if our faith in Christ and Scriptures should be but a think-so, too?" When John the Baptist had been cast into the prison in the fortress of Machaerus on the lonely shores of the Dead Sea, because of his fearlessness in denouncing Herod and Herodias for their adulterous union, there, in the lonely prison, his eagle eye began to film and his mighty spirit began to flag. Could it be possible that he had been mistaken when he cried out by the Jordan, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world"? Could it be possible that this, after all, was not he for whose coming God had sent him to prepare the way? "Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?" That was the question of anxiety and doubt which John sent to Jesus out of the prison.

The cry of John has found many an echo in the earnest prayer and cry or groan of some distressed and troubled soul, frightened by that specter, "Is Jesus Christ real?" "Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?" The mysterious providences of God in our own lives, the welter and rage of sin in the world, the slow progress, or no progress at all, of the Church in the world—all this may serve make one cry out, "Is Jesus Christ real?"

This is no idle question, but one which takes in the whole structure of human hope and destiny. Think of the alternative. Suppose that he is not real? Then, virtue, what art thou, but an empty name! Then righteousness and its vindication are but a delusion! Then forgiveness is an impossibility! Then life ends in the gloom and the dust of the grave! When I was in my study, pondering the question of the letter and what answer I could make, there was put into my hand a telegram giving the tidings of the death of a Christian friend. "Yes," I said to myself, as I read the words of the telegram over, "if Christ is not real, then the only real thing for this my friend, and for me, too, in my time, is death." If Christ is not real, hope is dead.

The Historical Reality of Christ

In the incident of the text, when Christ appeared to the disciples at their meeting place on the evening of the first Lord's Day, and without the doors having been opened, stood in the midst of them and said, "Peace be unto you," they were terrified and affrighted and supposed that they had seen a spirit, a ghost. But Jesus said, "Why are ye troubled? And why do thoughts arise in your mind? Behold my hands and my feet that it is I myself. Handle me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as

ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken he showed them his hands and feet."

The real and bodily resurrection of Christ is the foundation stone of the structure of Christian belief and hope. Those who claim that there was only a so-called spiritual resurrection, and throw out that statement as if it were something new, apparently forget that the first men to whom Jesus manifested himself had that idea about his resurrection. But Jesus was very careful to disabuse their minds of such an idea, and showed to them that the body which had been laid in the grave had now risen from the dead. "Behold my hands and my feet . . . . a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have." The reality of the resurrection was God's seal to the whole reality of Christ as the Son of God, as the teacher of supreme authority, as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world and as the heir to the throne of the universe, who shall come again to judge the quick and the dead.

In a recent issue of one of the best known magazines, a gifted and clever writer, dealing with the Christian belief, attempts to distinguish between what he calls the historical Christ and the traditional Christ. About the historical Christ he says we know practically nothing; but about the traditional Christ, that is, the Christ of the Gospel, and of the New Testament and of Christian worship and faith,

we have at least certain ideas and ideals which are worth receiving and following. He even goes the length of saying of such events as the Incarnation and the Resurrection, that it makes no difference whether they are true or not, so long as we have an ideal that has arisen out of these supposed facts. In other words, we are asked to believe in a Christ who never existed.

But the Christian faith never arose upon such a basis as that. Christianity cannot be historically false and ethically beautiful and true. If we do not have the great Christian facts as they are outlined for us in the Gospels, then we have no Christian doctrine and no Christian hope and no Christian life. You can't have leaves and fruit on a tree without roots. That Christianity has leaves and has fruit, ought to suggest to such writers that it must have roots also. To come to the conviction of the reality of Christ, you must begin there, with the historical reality. It is easy to ask questions and throw out suggestions of doubt as to the reality of one who appeared on the earth nineteen centuries ago; but when we commence to ask ourselves about the evidence for Jesus, we discover that we have more evidence for Christ than for any other historical figure. He has more monuments in stone, in marble, in poetry, in prose, in music, in canvas, and in disciples and followers. This great Effect which we call Chris-

tianity is unthinkable without a correspondingly great Cause. The only suitable and equivalent Cause is the real and historical Christ. When you attempt to account for the gospels, for the epistles, for St. Paul, for the Christian sacraments, for the Christian literature, without Christ, you are simply attempting the unthinkable and the impossible.

The reality of Christ alone accounts for the long endurance of his Church. Its approaching death, its quenched lights, its lost influence have been jubilantly declared and pronounced by its enemies in many an age and generation. Yet the Church goes on. There is something about it that has power. Men criticize it; men come into it, go out of it; but the Church goes on. Even as a historical and human fact, it is the greatest fact of history. What is the secret of its endurance? How does it come that it survived the subtle heresies and perversions of truth in the first centuries—Agnosticism, Manichaeism, Arianism? How does it come that no weapon lifted against it has prospered? How does it come that corruption and worldliness within have not destroyed the Church? How does it come that persecution from without did not drown the Church in its own blood? The only logical account is that the Church is founded upon the great Reality, Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God. "Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hell shall

not prevail against it." John Bunyan tells us how in the Interpreter's house he found a fire blazing. One kept throwing water on it, and yet the fire continued to burn. He wondered how this could be, until he was told that behind the wall, unseen, there was One pouring oil on the fire. The world does its best to put out the flame of the Christian Church. It looks, too, at times, as if the Christian people themselves did about all they could to put out the flame. Yet it burns on in the midnight darkness of a lost world, because it is fed by a divine hand and from a divine source.

Another answer which we might give to one who asks the question, "Is Christ real?" is Christ in human lives. The churches, the Sacraments, the Christian day, the Sabbath, the Christian customs and morals—all this is of vast importance. But there is another, perhaps more direct, witness, and that is the witness of Christian lives. Here are Peter, John, and Paul. Could they be real if Christ was not real? Is it possible that their enthusiasm and their courage and their glorious vision were the fruit of fraud or delusion?

I like to read those salutations of Paul at the end of his letters, especially the salutations at the end of his letter to the Roman believers—"Greet Priscilla and Aquila, who have for my life laid down their own necks. Salute my well beloved Epaenetus.

Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, who were in Christ before me. Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord. Salute Urbane, my helper in Christ; Apelles, approved of Christ. Salute Herodion, my kinsman. Salute the beloved Persis, who laboreth much in Christ. Salute Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine." The glory of Christianity, the glory of Christ has been that in every age the Christian writer or teacher at the end of his letter or epistle could call the roll of the true friends of Christ.

But it is not necessary to go so far back as the age of the Roman Christians. You have known some who are worthy to have their names called in that roll at the end of Paul's letter, men and women who were in Christ and labored much in the Lord. I remember conducting the funeral services of the mother of a minister who lived near to me when I was in my first church. He asked me to read the chapter in Proverbs about the virtuous woman. He told how his father used to read it at family worship, and when he had finished reading, he would close the book on his knee before they prayed, and say to the children, "Boys, there's your mother!"

So far we have been looking to the past, at the Christian facts and institutions, to Christian men and women for an answer to our question, "Is Christ real?" Now let us look within. Does not Christ

strike the chord of reality in our hearts? Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us by the way? Cannot you and I say, too, "My Lord and my God"? What could be more real than the unhappy feeling that when we have sinned we have been untrue, not only to a standard of life, not only broken the law, but have been untrue to the Truth himself, to Christ? We know how Peter felt when he heard the cock crow, saw Christ's look, and went out into the night and wept bitterly.

Do we not know his reality as a friend and companion? There is an intimacy to which even the nearest and the dearest must be a stranger.

> "Each in his hidden sphere of joy or woe
> Our hermit spirits dwell, and range apart—
> . . . . . .
> Nor even the tenderest heart, and next our own,
> Knows half the reasons why we smile and sigh."

There are, indeed, the limits of human sympathy and there are also the limits of human knowledge. There is only One who knows us thoroughly, and that One is Christ; and he is the One who has done the most for us. The One who knows all, from whom it would be vain to hide anything, he is the One who has done all for us.

Can we not testify, too, to the reality of Christ as the One who forgives our sin? Forgiveness? What is it? You cannot photograph it; you cannot

diagram it; you cannot register it. Yet to the penitent and believing heart there comes a sense of God's great goodness in Christ. My heart tells me that above all other realities in this great life of Christ is the reality of Calvary, and that there something was done which had to be done ere I could come to God. Any other kind of forgiveness would not have given me peace; but being justified through faith, I have peace with God.

Conclusion

1. To those whose eye of faith has become dim: Remember you are not the first to whom this has happened. Wait upon the Lord. The clouds will lift. When the mists and the fogs lift after a heavy day at sea, the headlands and the promontories are still there. Thomas Chalmers in his diary tells us how he took great consolation in the thought that it was not his brightly seeing Christ, but his looking toward him which saved him: and Henry Martyn, the noble missionary to India and Persia, takes comfort in the thought that he is saved, not by the intensity of his feelings, but by what Christ has done for him.

2. To those who have never ventured their faith in Christ, Christ is a reality, but not in a world of sense. No one can hear his voice now. None can see the wounds that Thomas saw. Yet Christ is

real, but real in the world of faith. Only by your faith can you make him real. It was Christ himself who said, "Because thou hast seen thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen and yet believed." When we believe, then it is we can sing:

"Jesus, these eyes have never seen
That radiant form of Thine;
The veil of sense hangs dark between
Thy blessed face and mine.

I see Thee not, I hear Thee not,
Yet art Thou oft with me;
And earth hath ne'er so dear a spot
As where I meet with Thee."

3. To all who profess their faith in Christ: We ought to live so as to help to make him real to others. If there is any earthly transgression which, though forgiven, might seem to have in it the power of casting a shadow over one's path in heaven, I think it would be the recollection that some word or action of ours had caused a fellow mortal to stumble at faith in Christ. Yet when each one of us searches his heart and reviews his past, he is conscious of words and deeds, which, if they did not actually make others to stumble, at least did not help others on the way to Christ. For this we must seek the forgiving love and mercy of Christ. When Peter smote the servant of the high priest in the Garden

of Gethsemane and cut off his ear, Jesus, undoing Peter's rash misrepresentation of his Master's spirit, at once stretched out his hand and healed the wounded man. O wise and compassionate Jesus, stretch forth Thy Hand and heal the wounds Thy servants have made!

"Cleanse thou me from secret faults."
PSALM 19: 12.

VI. *"Every man has his own ladder down to hell"*

A NUMBER of years ago I spent a Sabbath on the lovely isle of Bute. In the evening we walked along the shores of the eastern side of the island until we came to an ancient stone church standing on a grassy eminence which projected out into the sea. We were late for the service and, unwilling to disturb either the preacher or the congregation, sat down on the stone steps of the church. The door being open, we could hear distinctly the words of the minister. The long Scottish summer day was beginning to fade and the light was commencing to flash from many a white tower lighthouse in the distance. The subject of the minister's sermon was "Temptation." There is nothing worse than a poor sermon, nothing better than a good one. This was a good one. He was no ordinary preacher and said many things worth hearing, and which, having been heard once, are remembered. One sentence particularly stands out in my memory.

It was this: "Every man has his own ladder down to hell."

As I sat gazing on the beautiful twilight panorama of sea, mountains, islands, and the sky, this sentence sounded like a voice from another world. "Every man has his own ladder down to hell." The sentence tells the truth about human nature and reminds us of those capacities for evil which reside in every breast. There are ladders by which we can rise to heaven; there are also ladders which lead down into the abyss. This fact is not pleasant to contemplate, but the contemplation of it is profitable.

The preacher emphasized the fact, not only that ladders from human nature lead into the darkness and misery of transgression, but that every man has his *own* ladder. The ladder which leads down to hell in one nature may not be the same as that in another nature. With one, it may be greed, covetousness; with another, pride; with another, ambition; with another, hate; and with another, lust and sensuality.

I. Human Nature Is Fallen and Sinful

You ask for the evidence of this? You might as well go down to the Point Bridge and, leaning over the parapet where the Monongahela and the Allegheny mingle their waters, ask, Where is the Ohio? The evidences of man's relationship in his

present state to an underworld of transgression are universal and overwhelming. Although it is the fashion today to praise and gild human nature, it is just as well to remember that all this eulogy pronounced upon human nature does not change it in the least degree.

One volcano bursting out in flame and lava is sufficient to show what is found underneath the earth's surface. A single sin by a single man is sufficient to show the nature of the human heart.

Now and then you hear someone maintain that the cosmogony or astronomy or the biology of the Bible needs revision. I do not feel so. I believe that when the whole truth is known, the revelation of God in the Scripture will be found to be in agreement with the revelation of God in nature. But however that may be, I have never yet heard anyone say that the Bible's statement about the heart of man, about the nature of man, needs revision. It is an analysis of human nature which is supported by so many facts that it is absolutely irrefragible. When one begins to talk on this subject, he need have no fear that he will go beyond the mark in what he has to say about the heart of man. The old definition still stands, "The heart of man is desperately wicked and deceitful above all things." Since I share in that nature, it behooves me to be on my guard.

II. Temptations Which Seek to Induce Us to Descend That Ladder Which Goes Down into Hell

1. *Known temptations.* There are those who have no difficulty with the proposition that there are temptations which seek to drag us down. Some of them they know well, and with them have had bitter experience. They know passageways which, if taken, could lead very quickly down into darkness. It may be a known temptation, to dishonesty, to greed, or to pride and ambition, or bodily appetite and lust.

I once received a letter from a young man who said that he was assailed by temptation, and that he was afraid that in a weak moment he would yield and bring remorse and shame upon himself and pain and grief to one whom he loved. His trouble was not in realizing the fact that there is a ladder which leads down to hell, but in the dread that he might sometimes take that ladder. He asked me to say something that would help in his battle. Writing to him, I answered: "You have a great advantage in realizing that the things which you have been tempted to do are wrong. That makes a good platform on which to stand and fight your battle. Get a Bible and read the first part of the thirty-ninth chapter of Genesis, and you will see

how another young man acted under the attack of a similar temptation. He said, 'How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?' Remember that no man can afford to sin against God. Whatever the temporary satisfaction, punishment and judgment are sure to follow. Your sin will find you out in the next world, if not in this. I know not what your surroundings are; but remember that a man is capable of doing anything and resisting anything, if he *wills* to do it, and asks God for help. That is the splendid thing about man. Determine in your own will that you will not think of such a thing as this sin, or any other sin, and you will find that the temptation begins to lose its power. Keep your mind occupied with worthy thoughts. Do not forget to read the Bible and do not forget to pray. Put your trust in Christ as your Savior and ask him to deliver you from evil. He has promised he will do this. He is able to keep you from falling."

2. *Unknown temptations.* These are the most destructive. The Psalmist said, "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults." From the way in which this prayer is introduced, it is plain that the Psalmist is not thinking of those sins which men practice in secret, but of sins which get a lodging place in a man's heart and begin to do their dark work without the man being aware of it.

So he says, "Cleanse thou me from secret sins." I suppose it is possible to have a besetting sin known to everyone but ourselves. There is nothing of which man is so ignorant as he is of himself. There are guests in his heart whom he never sees.

It is alarming to think that transgression can establish itself, fortify itself in a human heart, and yet at the same time disguise and hide itself and work in silence and in secret. One of the reasons for this may be that its first approach to the soul was not resisted. Only the rock which throws itself up against the current of a rapidly flowing river gives any idea of how strong the current is. It is when sin is resisted that we discover its power. Sin unresisted is as noiseless as the gliding stream and as viewless as the wind which sweeps over land and ocean.

Temptation and sin have a way of creating the darkness under cover of which they do their work. This is due in part to the fact that conscience deteriorates as sin advances.

Another reason why unknown and unrecognized transgressions slowly gain dominion over the heart of a man is that we fear to discover that which is disagreeable. We don't really want to know the truth about ourselves, for it is not pleasant to discover that we are different from what we have sup-

posed ourselves to be, or from what others have generally taken us to be.

The great deceiver is the human heart. It is "deceitful above all things," and nowhere is its deceitfulness and its subtlety so manifested as when it persuades one that all is well, when all is far from well and the man may be many rounds down on the ladder which leads to hell. There are some diseases which seem to have the power of getting a foothold in the body, and doing their dangerous work and advancing far toward their goal, which is to take the life of a man, before they betray their presence. It is only when they lift their hand to strike the fatal blow that the ravages of the disease are discovered. So it is with some temptations. In silence and in secrecy they slowly undermine the strongholds of the soul, and it is not until the walls begin to crumble that the heart realizes its danger.

We have a striking instance of this in the history of Hazael. When the prophet Elisha, looking into the face of Hazael, predicted the sin and crime of Hazael, and all the evil that he would do to the children of Israel, and plainly intimated that he would assassinate the king, Benhadad, and take his throne, Hazael drew back with unaffected horror, and cried out, "What, is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?" To this the prophet answered, briefly, "The Lord hath shewed me that

thou shalt be king." The next day, while the king slept, Hazael slipped into his chamber and, taking a towel, dipped it in water, wrung it out, and put it tightly over the face of the sleeping king. A few convulsive struggles and Benhadad was dead, and Hazael reigned in his stead. As he went out from the chamber to inaugurate a reign of crime and violence which outdid the prophet's sketch, was it from the still lips of the smothered king, or was it from the hidden depths of his own conscience that there sounded those words which but yesterday he had uttered to Elisha, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?"

The incident is an alarming comment upon human nature, teaching us, first of all, how ignorant we may be of our own hearts, and how evil may thrive and expand in the heart and we be ignorant of it until the evil thing is done. Then with sad and bitter recollection the man cries out, "How could I have done it!" and others exclaim, "Who would have thought it!" "Who can know himself and the multitude of subtle influences which act upon him?"

The real fall of a soul generally antedates the fall which men observe, and the fact is that there is nothing sudden or unaccountable in such a fall. I can still hear the sad and bitter echo of the exclamation of one who had taken a ladder down into darkness, "How could I ever have done it!" Yet

a little later, as she recited the history of her misfortune, she quoted what she had said to the one who had tempted her, before the descent into darkness was made, "Remember, we are not made of iron!" Sometime I want to take that expression for a text for a Sermon from Life—"Remember, we are not made of iron." It was another way of putting what the Scottish preacher said on the twilight evening in Bute, "Every man has his own ladder down to hell."

Sometimes we hear it said that every man has his price. I do not believe this. It is one of the devil's lies. But that every man is temptable, that every man has inclinations which, if yielded to, would lead him into the darkness, that I believe from what I see of human nature about me and from what I know of my own heart. According to the old myth, Thetis, his mother, took Achilles by the heel and dipped him in the River Styx, so that his body could receive no wound. Every part was submerged but the tendon of the heel by which he was held, and there one day, in that one vulnerable spot, he received the fatal shaft. Thus men have, as it were, a moral Tendon of Achilles.

If a sermon like this should be the means of sending one soul to examine himself, to take heed to himself, and thus be saved from sin and moral ruin and sorrow without measure, then I say an angel

might well envy me my place today. In view of this solemn fact about human nature, there are a number of practical conclusions which force themselves upon us. In the first place, it will be wise to accept the Bible's verdict as to the nature of our hearts. All that sin asks you to do is to put your trust in your own heart. It will do the rest. Remember what the heart is and remember that you are not made of iron.

In the second place, keep a watch over your thoughts and imaginations. Because they regard the thing which has been flashed upon them as impossible, men have thought it safe to admit it in thought. This was the first step in their downfall. Each man is tempted by his own desire, and the desire when it has conceived, bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is full grown, bringeth forth death. Always death—death to ideals, death to ambition, death to hope, death to happiness, Death! "Whatever makes any bad action familiar to the mind renders the performance so much easier." Therefore take heed to your thoughts!

Another means of safety is self-examination. A man can know what his face is like only by having it reflected in a mirror, and he must see it many times before the image will be impressed upon the eye of his mind. The only way a man can know his own heart is by examination. Examine yourself

and see if you can mark any decline in moral sensitiveness. Are there things that you can do now without the least compunction of conscience which a year ago or five years ago would have cost you many a pang and deep unhappiness? If so, beware. Test yourself and see what your weak side is, where the enemy is most likely to break through. Find out what your most easily besetting sin is. You can find it out if you wish. What is the thought that impresses you when you think of Christ? What is the sin that rises up to confuse you when you come to the communion table? A fearless, honest answer to these questions here tonight in the hush of God's house may be a tremendous advantage to you. But best of all, have Christ in your heart. That internal defense is better than any habit or bastion of resolution. Temptation finds the Christ-filled heart as the spark finds the ice, the water the marble, but the Christless heart it finds as the spark finds the powder magazine.

I am not forgetting in this sermon those who have discovered the truth that every man has his ladder down to hell. For you there is possible the grandest effort and the greatest success of which man is capable. Satan has two deadly lies. The first is when he tells a man when he is tempted to do something that it doesn't matter, and is no sin. The second is when he comes to him after he has yielded

and says to him, It matters so much that there is no hope. You can never be any different. You belong to me. But, thank God, if there is a ladder which leads down into the depths, there is another ladder which rises out of darkness into sunlight, lifts itself out of the misery of remorse, out of the mire of despair into the sunlight and peace of God's grace and forgiveness.

Longfellow and Tennyson in their poetry have both made the idea very familiar, but the original author of it was St. Augustine, for it was he who said that by trampling our sins and vices under our feet we frame a ladder by which we rise on our dead selves to higher things.

There is no grander spectacle in the universe than when a soul lays hold upon that golden ladder and commences the ascent from the depths to the heights. The battlements of heaven are crowded with spectators when that happens.

Jacob, far out on the desert, lonely, homesick, conscience-stricken, his pillow a stone wet with his tears, dreamed a dream and saw a ladder set up on earth, the top of which reached unto heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending that ladder. It was a ladder of hope for Jacob. Centuries after, Jesus Christ, referring to that great dream and to that golden ladder, said that the ladder was himself: "Henceforth ye shall see the heavens

opened, and angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." Yes, thank God, Christ crucified is the Ladder of rescue and reconciliation which leads us out of our sin, no matter what that sin has been, into the upper regions of fellowship with the good and the pure, where there shall be no more temptation, no more curse and no more sin, and no more darkness; for the Lamb of God, in all his forgiveness and all his tenderness and all his power, will be the light thereof.

"No man hath hired us."
MATTHEW 20: 7.

VII. *Beating against the bars*

ONE of the chief magnets for the traveler in England is Stokes Poges Church, with the towers of Eton and Windsor in the distance. As one who saw them long ago said:

> "Ye distant spires, ye antique towers,
> That crown the watery glade."

But Eton and Windsor are both forgotten when one enters Stokes Poges churchyard, for the visitor commences to recite to himself those never-fading lines:

> "The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
> The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea."

Here it was that Thomas Gray is supposed to have written his immortal *Elegy*. Wandering among the graves, one thinks of what Gray said about these simple folk, unknown to fortune and to fame, and how in this neglected spot lie those

who might have taken a great place in the world; but life gave them no platform on which to stand and no opportunity to express the greatness that was in them.

"Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid,
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed,
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre.

But knowledge to their eyes her ample page,
Rich with the spoils of time, did ne'er unroll;
Chill penury repressed their noble rage,
And froze the genial current of the soul."

Every cemetery has in it the dust of men like that. Every community in every city has living in it men and women within whom are locked up, perhaps genius, sometimes talent, and very often, at least, desire for distinction in life. I thought of Gray's *Elegy* and those whom he celebrates in his verse when I read a letter from one who had found no place in which to invest the talent of life. She tells me that she is thirty-three years of age, earning twenty-seven dollars a week as a bookkeeper; has a superior education; is Christian in faith and practice; and, conscious of some skill in the use of words, has a burning desire to become a writer. But when she comes home at night, she finds herself too weary and spent to take up the pen and write. For several years she has tried vainly to get into

some other and more congenial fields. One year is added to another, but no door has opened. There is anxiety and heavy misgiving, lest today's dull routine should ever be tomorrow's task, and that the talent she feels within herself should never find a market. "It is more than irksome to sit at a desk of a financial institution, day in and day out, expressing my life in terms of bookkeeping entries. Is this the best I can give the world, and the best the world can give me?"

Reading the letter, I thought to myself, her name is Legion. How many such letters, written or sealed up in the heart, there are! What a regiment it is that I see now marching past when I think of that letter. Here they are, sitting at the counting desk, adding up columns of figures, punching tickets, opening doors, pulling ropes, selling neckties, hewers of wood and drawers of water, and yet conscious of some degree of talent which to them it would be death to hide, feeling within them the urge and desire to get out, to express themselves; but whichever way they turn, the bars of the prison house shut them in, and vainly, and sometimes bitterly and sadly, they beat against those bars. With one it is a handicap of sickness, a body not strong enough for the mind; with others, the hard, weary struggle for daily bread, leaving no spirit or oil in the lamp for higher things; with another, the care of depend-

ents; and with another, lack of training and education. What is in them can't get out. This brings, sometimes, rebellion and bitterness, and if not that, then sadness. What a regiment it is! Tramp! Tramp! Tramp! With two banners waving over them—the manner of hope, and yet the ensign of discouragement, sometimes despair.

"I sing the hymn of the conquered, who fell in the battle of Life,
The hymn of the wounded, the beaten, who died overwhelmed in the strife;
Not the jubilant song of the victors, for whom the resounding acclaim
Of nations was lifted in chorus, whose brows wore the chaplet of fame,
But the hymn of the low and the humble, the weary, the broken in heart,
Who strove and who failed, acting bravely a silent and desperate part;
Whose youth bore no flowers on its branches, whose hope burned in ashes away,
From whose hands slipped the prize they had grasped at, who stood at the dying of day
With the wreck of their life all around them, unpitied, unheeded, alone.
With death swooping down o'er their failure, and all but their faith overthrown."

As we sing the song of these imprisoned ones who beat against their bars and who represent a vast company in life, those who are ready to go into the

vineyard, but cannot, because no man hath hired them, what shall we say?

I. That All Work Is Necessary and Honorable

This impatient bookkeeper by her faithful and yet monotonous work was doing more than just contributing to the material prosperity of X Y Z and Company. She was doing her part in keeping moving the great wheel of industry. The treadmill may be monotonous and dull, but it is necessary and honorable. When David made his raid against the Philistines, there were some in his army who were not able to make the rapid march. Them he left guarding the baggage. When he came back triumphant after the battle, laden with booty and spoil, he divided the spoils of battle equally among those who had fought in the battle and those who had guarded the camp. When the fighters objected to this, David said, "As his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that abideth by the stuff." Abiding by the stuff was not as exciting and spectacular work as clashing with the Philistines. But it was a necessary work, and therefore those who did it shared in the reward of those who went down to the battle. No work done honestly and in the fear of God is lost. In saying this, I do not mean to pretend that there is no difference in the

kind of work men do, and there are many kinds of work in which I should imagine myself miserable and unhappy, unless fortified by the principles which I am trying to state in this sermon. For thirty-three years Charles Lamb toiled as a clerk in the East India office. In moments of leisure he did, indeed, succeed in getting free, and forever enriched the reading and thinking world with his *Essays of Elia,* and other well-known works. Lamb once wrote a sonnet to *Work:*

"Who first invented work, and bound the free,
And holy-day rejoicing spirit down,
To the ever haunting importunity
Of business in green fields and the town—
To plough, loom, anvil, spade—and oh! most sad,
To that dry drudgery at the desk's dead wood?"

Then Lamb goes on to attribute the invention of work to "Sabbathless Satan." But on this count we will let Satan go free, for although the hard grind of toil came after the fall, work was a part of man's original constitution, for God put him in the Garden to till it and keep it. Whatever work we do, then, honestly and faithfully, is a contribution to the welfare of man and helps to maintain the fabric of civilization.

II. That Life Is a Probation

The very discontent of man and the disharmony between himself and his environment is a token of

man's greatness and also of his fall. To none does life give an opportunity to express all that is in him, nor does anyone reach quite as far as his desire, nor is there complete adjustment between capacity, environment, and desire in this life. Whether a man is doing the lowest and most monotonous task on earth, or a work which, to an outside observer, it seems only one man in a thousand could do, he never finds complete satisfaction, and is always conscious of a something beyond that he might have done, that he would like to do, but cannot. I suppose this is the meaning of Samuel Johnson's famous tale, *Rasselas*. The Prince of Abyssinia, shut up in his narrow valley, thought that he could secure all that his heart desired if he got out of the valley. But after roaming over the world, he came back to the valley, bringing with him the discovery that the world could not give that complete happiness for which he was so earnestly looking.

The only key to the mystery of life is that life is a probation, a moral trial, the purpose of which is to develop and exercise moral qualities with a view to their use here in this life and their coronation in the life to come. Certainly, if the purpose of life is just for pleasure, contentment, satisfaction, the attainment of one's ambitions, then it is a sad failure. But if the purpose of life is moral, to

afford opportunity to test us and to try us, then life, wherever you take it, is a grand success.

Paley tells somewhere of a West Indian slaveholder and a West Indian slave, and how, although there is such a gulf between them as to position, they are on equal footing as to moral opportunity, the master by self-restraint and benevolence in a place of arbitrary power, the slave by forbidding to himself resentment and hatred. The agent of probation is incidental; the main thing is the probation.

"Play well your part; there all the honor lies."

The writer of this letter asks me, referring to her hard and ill remunerated task, "Is this the best life can give me?" My answer is, "Yes," because no place or post in life can give one more than the opportunity to develop and exercise moral qualities. "And is this the best I can give to life?" this woman asks. Again, my answer is "Yes," for the greatest contribution that anyone can make to life, to his day and generation, is to answer the call of life's opportunity in whatever circumstance, and display honor, courage, kindness, faith. No one can give more to life than that. Had the writer of this letter been able to break her prison bars and get free and write the novel which she had in mind, success would have tried her just as much as failure.

"Then, welcome each rebuff that turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor stand nor sit, but go."

III. That the Discontent with Our Present State and the Desire to Do Something Beyond It Is in Itself a Token of Man's Greatness

The discrepancy between man's desire and man's fulfilment and, we may say, his opportunity, is an intimation of man's immortality. How many men and women we see who seem just to have missed it in life, and who, we have reason to believe, would have been eminently successful had they made other contacts or been surrounded with encouragement. They would have been glad to go into the vineyard, but no man would hire them. Chill penury repressed their noble rage, or knowledge failed to unroll her ample page before them. If this is true of the unplaced, the baffled, the beaten, the imprisoned, those who never caught on in life, it is also true of those whom we think of as the most successful. If the gap between the unsuccessful and the beaten in life and their desires and capacity speaks of immortality, so does the gap between the attainments of the most successful and their desires and talents. On his seventieth birthday, Victor Hugo wrote: "Winter is on my head, but eternal spring is in my heart. For half a century I have

been writing my thoughts in prose, verse, history, philosophy, drama, romance, tradition, satire, ode, song—I have tried all. But I feel that I have not said the thousandth part of what is in me." Or, in the words of Thomas Chalmers: "Man feels an interminable longing after nobler and higher things which nothing but immortality and the greatness of immortality can satiate."

It is the Christian hope of the future which reconciles man to his lot and makes tolerable the burdens which he has to bear. Our prison house is indeed dark and terrible, if it be not lighted by the lamp of faith, or if there be no hope that one day all these bars shall be severed and the imprisoned spirit get free and enter into that life where there is a beautiful proportion between a man's endowments and his opportunity. There none will need to stand in the market place and say with melancholy lament, "No man hath hired us," for everyone shall serve to the utmost of his strength and his ability. There there shall be no hiatus between ambition and opportunity, between capacity and employment. In all the powers, the incomparable, and still to us unimaginable, powers of a redeemed personality, man shall enter into the fulness of life, for Christ came that we might have life and that we might have it more abundantly. In the meantime, be of good courage; persevere unto the end, and let the lamp

of faith shed its soft and hallowing ray upon your path. Think of other souls in prison and help them to bear their burden. Have courage in your own. "Wait, I say, on the Lord. Be of good courage, and he shall bring it to pass."

"It is for my good that I have been afflicted." PSALM 119: 71.

VIII. *"If I had, I would not be here today"*

1. "If I had, I would not be here today."
2. "At first, I felt it was God's punishment of me; now I think it was his way to win me."

A MINISTER and a chorus girl are far apart, and represent different worlds. But from these extremes of life's callings I take this sermon from life.

We commence with the minister. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall," especially those who stand in holy offices, for Satan desires to see them, above all others, step aside from the path of rectitude. Where he has a hundred temptations for the ordinary man, he has a thousand for the minister of the Gospel. This man, either by slow decline and descent, or a sudden fall, had gone far from God. When he gave up his holy calling, he engaged in a business venture, his heart still hardened and his conscience unaroused. In this en-

terprise he failed. The failure brought in its train humiliation, poverty, absolute want. Then he awoke to his spiritual condition and to a sense of his sin. He was glad that he had not succeeded in his business venture, and though he had suffered much, he counted what he had gained, his spiritual awakening and his return to God, worth the price he had paid in outward struggle and internal distress. That's what he meant as he sat one day in my study and said to me, "If I had, I would not be here." He meant that had he been successful he might have felt that he could get along without God, and that his material prosperity might have blinded him to his moral nakedness and his spiritual poverty. Now that he saw his true state, had come to himself, had repented, and had got right with God, he almost trembled to think that if God had let him succeed in worldly affairs he might have been still far from repentance and far from God. His hardships and his sufferings had brought him back to God.

The vaudeville dancer, in some ways, more sinned against than sinning, had suffered greatly. She had given all that a woman has to give, only to be betrayed and abandoned. Her one compensation, if such it could be called, or rather consolation, was the child. But, as in the case of David, the Lord smote the child, and it died, leaving the mother dazed, amazed, full of revolt against life, and burning with

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fierce hatred of the one with whom she had sinned. Yet it was this crushing sorrow which at first had seemed to put out all the light and hope of her life, which, in reality, opened for her the door to a new life and kindled the light of hope. It was the beginning of the process of divine visitation and discipline whereby she was brought to the place of confession, of penitence and faith. Her heart now softened, all hatred and bitterness washed from it by the tears of penitence, she said, "At first I felt it was God's punishment of me; now I think it was his way to win me."

Although in a different language, both the minister and the chorus girl were saying what the Psalmist said so many ages ago, "It is for my good that I have been afflicted." Although we may not realize it at the time, adversity, affliction, suffering, trouble, are angels which meet us by the way, and which, if we follow them, will lead us to God. Do men gather grapes of thorns, figs of thistles? No. Not in the agricultural sense; but in the agriculture and horticulture of life, in the sense that we benefit by adversity and affliction, men do gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles.

I. The Way of the Transgressor Is Hard

Both of these persons with whom we commenced recognized in their afflictions an element of punish-

ment and retribution. The preacher was sure that punishment played its part in his case. He said he used to preach on such passages as that about the tower of Siloam, and tell people that they must be careful about associating suffering or calamity in this life with transgression, and that adversity here was not necessarily penal or tributory. Now, however, he said, judging from his own experience, were he to enter a pulpit again, he would stress the other side, and tell men how wrongdoing brings pain and suffering, even in this life, and that the way of the transgressor is hard, here and now. The chorus girl was sure that her sufferings were punishment. At first she saw only the punishment. Afterward she was able to discern the purpose back of it.

Waiving for the moment the ultimate purpose of affliction and adversity, we recognize that the inevitable issue of wrongdoing is unhappiness. The moral constitution of the world is such that nothing else is possible. The Garden of Eden became a wilderness where thorns infested the ground and life was sustained only by grinding toil, when sin entered that Garden. This is the eternal parable of life. Wherever sin enters the garden of man's life, its flowers wither, its fruits rot, its fountains dry up, and its birds no longer sing. Thrown off for a moment amid the pleasures or cares of life,

the unhappiness of sin returns to arraign and plague the guilty soul. Conscience may sleep for a season; but when it awakens, its awakening is all the more terrible.

Punishments from God are useful to us, for they show the low level of our life. There is no light so true by which to test our characters as the light of adversity and affliction, for at such a time the magnifying influence of self-flattery and self-excuse disappears. These punishments, too, show the deadly nature of sin, and that, although God is merciful to forgive, he hates sin and must punish it. The way of the transgressor is hard, and no one has yet discovered a way to make it easy. Even sin forgiven must bear its temporal penalty.

"Wounds of the soul, though healed, will ache,
The reddening scars remain,
And make confession;
Lost innocence returns no more;
We are not what we were,
Before transgression."

Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. But of all the thorns and brambles which infest the path of the sons of Adam, none is so bitter or pierces so deep as the suffering which is the result of transgression.

II. A State of Faith and Penitence, a Heart Right Toward God, Is the Great Goal and Highest Possession of Life

The preacher was glad that he went bankrupt financially, because otherwise he might have been left bankrupt morally and spiritually and never repented and sought the Lord. The chorus girl was glad that she had passed through the fire, because in this way she had learned that God loved her and was seeking to save her soul. The personal history of both serves to bring out the pre-eminent value of the soul, that the soul interests must come first, and that the only riches are the riches of the spirit. Both came to understand what before had been to them mere rhetoric, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness." Yes, it is the laboratory of life which takes great passages of God's Word like that and makes them real to us. Hitherto they have been only a pleasant sound, something the truth of which we accept as a general law. Now the fire has touched us, and we know, experimentally, that the thing is true. The fire had touched these lives and they came to know that the Kingdom of God and his righteousness is the first end of life.

I remember an officer in a Presbyterian church in the east, who had been very successful in his operations, but who at length had failed in some great business enterprise, and said to his pastor,

"I am glad that I failed, for I was getting away from God." Prosperity has its perils, and the prayer of Proverbs will be still a wise prayer for every man—"Give me neither poverty nor riches—lest I be full and deny thee and say, Who is the Lord?" How modern, how up-to-date, how applicable to any successful business man or professional man in our own day are these timeless truths of God's eternal Word! Amid all the shifting scenes, the fading music, the floating phantasmagoria of life, may we remember that the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

III. Adversities and Sufferings and Failures May Be God's Way to Turn Our Hearts to Him

This preacher saw that. He had found the way back to God, and his sufferings had not been too great a price, "If I had," he said, that is, "If I had succeeded in business, I would not be now here in your study, talking with you about my soul." This same truth was learned and accepted by the chorus girl. Looking back over her trials, she was able to say, "But now I think it was God's way to win me."

Neither, I suppose, thought so in the first struggle with their trials and affliction. But not even David said, "It is for my good that I am afflicted." What he said was, "It is for my good that I *was*

afflicted." So, like David, looking back, these friends were able to say, "It is for my good that I was afflicted." Sometimes we must wait long before we can learn that lesson and make that confession.

"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace,
Behind a frowning Providence,
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour,
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower."

One of the worst of the kings of Judah was Manasseh, the wicked son of a godly father, Hezekiah. After a reign of half a century, in which he worked private and public iniquity such as the nation had never seen, he was carried into Babylonian captivity, there to be tortured and mutilated. Then his life's history had a strange turning; and if that was possible for Manasseh, the blind and wicked old king, it is possible for everyone. "When he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him, and he was entreated of him and heard his supplication and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord, he was God."

Yes, that is life's greatest lesson. Any exile, any

cup of bitterness, any suffering, any disappointment of cherished hope or desire, is a cheap price to pay, if thereby we make the discovery that the Lord is God. The tears of repentance wash our eyes so that they can discern God in his glory and in his tender compassion. Jeremy Taylor, author of so many wonderful sayings, strikes the note that I am trying to strike here when he says in his inimitable way, "We are safe at sea, safer in the storm God sends us, than when we are befriended by the world." God's storms blow us to the port of repentance and faith. It was so, at least, in the case of this minister and this vaudeville dancer. Both found God and were glad that they had paid the price.

In that tremendous scene in the *Scarlet Letter* where Arthur Dimmesdale is dying and takes farewell of Hester and her child, Hester, bending over the dying minister, says to him: "Shall we not spend our immortal life together? Surely, surely, we have ransomed one another with all this woe. Thou lookest far into eternity with those bright, dying eyes. Then, tell me what thou seest."

"Hush, Hester, hush," answered the minister, with tremulous solemnity; "I fear, I fear. It may be that when we forgot our God, when we violated our reverence each for the other's soul, it was thenceforth vain to hope that we could meet hereafter in an everlasting and pure reunion. God knows and

he is merciful. He hath proved his mercy most of all in my afflictions. By giving me this burning torture to bear upon my breast! By sending yonder dark and terrible old man to keep the torture always at red heat! By bringing me hither to die this death of triumphant ignominy before the people! Had either of these agonies been wanting, I had been lost forever. Praise be to his name. His will be done. Farewell."

Jacob came out of the all-night struggle with the angel lame, maimed, and halting on his thigh; but it was a new Jacob upon whom the sun rose by the fords of the Jabbok that morning. There he discovered God and there God blessed him. Henceforth his name was Israel, "A prince with God." So may all our midnight struggles, all our losses, all our defeats, all our secret pangs bring us nearer to God.

"One thing thou lackest."
MARK 10: 4.
"Unto you which believe he is precious." 1 PETER 2: 7.

IX. *"There is something missing"—What? Who?*

1. "But there is something missing."
2. "If I had never known him!"

THIS first sentence of the two from which we take our sermon from life came at the end of a letter which I received from a man who had great fault to find with the Church, and especially with ministers. There is a type of mind which seems to hold ministers responsible for all the ills of humanity. If politics are corrupt, it is their fault; if men are out of work, they are to blame. This man thought that ministers were strident and un-Christian in their denunciation of public evils and public men. He said we ought to work more on the plan of St. Paul, who by his gentleness rescued Onesimus out of the gutter. Then he added that, although he had had a godly Scottish Presbyterian training, he had not been to church for sixteen

years. I suppose that was the reason he had such an accurate knowledge of what the Church was doing.

It was the kind of letter which sometimes provokes one to answer in the same tone. Instead of doing that, I wrote the man and told him that I thought he was mistaken in the point of view he had taken, that since he evidently knew something about the Bible he must know how the prophets and Christ himself denounced sin and sinners in public and high places; and, as for St. Paul, that almost every sermon he preached ended in a riot. Then I referred to what he had told me about his early training; how he had been given to God in baptism; how he had had a godly home, a Christian father and mother; and how with such a start in life he could never be happy in his present place of aloofness and alienation. In closing, I invited him to return to the Church and claim his covenant privilege in the house of God. This kind of an answer evidently surprised the man, and certainly disarmed him, for he wrote again, and this time in an altogether different tone. He confessed that his first letter was nothing but foolish and envenomed ranting, and that I was right in what I had said. He thought that perhaps his war experience had engendered indifference to religion, for he said, "Out of a comparatively brief life, forty-one years, I have

had nine years of actual fighting." Then he added, "But there is something missing."

The second sentence, "If I had never known him," I have sometimes heard as an expression of sorrow and bitterness. Looking back over the pages of life, the wounded or saddened soul could wish that the date on which this meeting took place could be expunged from the calendar of existence. What a difference even a single meeting, then apparently so trivial, can make in life!

But here the sentence was used in a different way, not an exclamation of regret, but an exclamation of joy and devotion. The one to whom the speaker referred was Christ. She who said this was a hard-working, care-driven, humble woman. When she said to me, "If I had never known him," and with no need of the sentence being finished, what she meant was this: "How different my life would have been. With whom could I have talked morning and evening? Who would have helped me to lift my burdens, to bear my griefs, and carry my sorrows?" "What if his grace had never found me?" To her who believed, Christ was precious. She trembled to think how it might have been with her if she had never known him.

Here, then, we have a life without Christ, yet dimly conscious that something, even the great thing,

was missing; and, in the second speaker, the confession that Christ is the great possession of the soul.

I. "There Is Something Missing"

The man in his letter referred to his early Calvinistic Presbyterian training, and evidently with respect and affection. It had left its imprint, never altogether to be eradicated. Men who have had such a training may appear to revolt against it and try to throw it off; but they can't do it, for it is now a part of themselves. They can no more throw it off than they can dismiss their shadow.

In his Letter to Timothy, Paul seeks to stir him up to purity and fidelity by reminding him of the unfeigned faith which was in his grandmother Lois and in his mother Eunice. Where one has come under the influence of such faith unfeigned, one never gets entirely away from it. There are two kinds of religious experience, and two religious facts; and fortunately so. One is the fact of a special, and sometimes critical, overturning and conversion; so that one can name the hour, the place, the persons. The other is the slow but steady imprint of early religious training. Of the two, probably the latter experience is the more important. Such a training sets a voice within us speaking, and that voice is never altogether silent. In times of sorrow and trial it speaks softly and pleadingly; in

times of danger, quickly and with warning. A man who had had a godly father and had plunged into excesses, but afterward came back to sober, godly living, confessed that he could never get a real joy out of his godless, licentious life because he was never able to dismiss the thought of his godly father.

Here was this man who had made a good start, and now that voice of the long ago had suddenly commenced to speak within him. What are sixteen years, or, for that matter, sixty years, when one has had faith unfeigned presented to him by word, precept, and example? Once again the chords were touched and the old music was heard. It was like the story of a man who had gone far and traveled far in the world and then went back to his native village. Everything was changed: there was not a street, store, or house which he could recognize. Even the fields and the trees were different. But there was one thing which was just the same, and that was the spring out of which, as a thirsty barefoot boy, he used to drink. An early religious training is a fountain which never ceases to flow and to which the world-sated and time-weary soul returns to quench his thirst.

"Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter,
Feelings lie buried which grace can restore.
Touched by a loving hand, wakened by kindness,
Chords that were silent shall vibrate once more."

When Christ said to the rich young ruler, "One thing thou lackest," we know that he did not mean health, wealth, friends, intelligence, attractiveness of personality; for all of these things the young man had. The one thing that he lacked was God. Man was made for God. He hath set eternity in our hearts, and none but God can satisfy these hearts. This hunger for God, disowned and dishonored, men sometimes try to satisfy in business, drink, sex, skepticism; but it is a vain effort. Some men try to bury their souls and heap over it clothes, food, drink, check books, dresses, clubs, horses, automobiles, dances; but just when they think the job is well finished and the soul well interred, lo, it appears again on the surface. You can't bury your soul! This man found it to be so. After sixteen years his soul began to speak again. So it will always be; even in the far country among the swine, the son thought of his father's house.

"Just when we're safest, there's a sunset touch,
A chorus ending from Euripides,
Someone's death—and that's enough
For fifty doubts or fears."

II. "If I Had Not Known Christ"

If she had not known Christ, she would have been without the greatest Friend. I read in the papers the other day a curious will, in which the mother left

to her son chiefly good advice and counsel. At the end of the will she said that she wanted to thank him for his kindness and affection, because his love had made the last twenty-five years of her life well worth living. Contemplating the end of this earthly life, the woman confessed that the love of her son had made life well worth living. Even in the human sense, this is true. No one who loves has lived in vain. But whatever may be the fortune or misfortune of human relationships, the love of Christ and the love for Christ will always make life worth living. All need, even on the human side, a friend and companion, and those who seem to need this the least perhaps need it the most. A friend wrote me sometime ago after the death of her mother, and in the letter was a beautiful tribute, not only to her mother, but to all mothers. She spoke of the all-understanding and all-pitying and all-forgiving love of a mother. And of a good mother that is beautifully true. The Bible says, "Like as a father pitieth his children"; but here and there we feel like adding, "and a mother," for what better measure have we with which to measure the faithful and tender friendship of Christ?

"What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!

Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness.
Take it to the Lord in prayer."

If this woman had not known Christ, she would have been without a Helper in temptation. No word is more common than temptation; no fact more terrific. All that you have, all that you cherish, all that is sacred within you; and now it is in jeopardy, the object of possession on the part of the adversary of souls, who likes nothing better than to sift the soul and separate it from its God. This experience must always be a lonely one, whether the battle field is a quiet study, a crowded office, a thronged highway, or a country lane where the branches of the trees meet overhead. There one is alone, yet not alone. In his last message to the world St. Paul tells how this or that friend has forsaken him, and how his enemies surrounded him; but he says, "The Lord stood with me, and strengthened me." Always for the soul who knows Christ there is that mighty exception—"notwithstanding the Lord stood with me"; and when he stands with us we fight not alone. "Temptations lose their power, when thou art nigh." A woman once gave to her lover a talisman against temptation and danger. It was a moth suspended between a flame and a star. When the man's spirit inclined toward temptation,

the moth sank toward the flame. When he resisted temptation, the moth rose toward the star. But better than any such talisman as that is Christ our helper on his cross. When we forget him, we sink toward the flame. When we behold him, we rise toward the stars.

If the soul does not know Christ, it cannot know forgiveness. What if man could sin but could not be forgiven! Imagine how it would have been with Peter if, when he cursed and denied that he ever knew him, Jesus had not turned and looked upon him. Sobs followed that look; but they are the music by which a soul marches home to God. The forgiveness of God is something that we all need. What if I had not known him! What if there were no Christ to whom I could turn!

To all, then, who have believed, and who sometimes will be perplexed and troubled, almost tempted perhaps to give up their struggle, my word is, "Hold fast that which thou hast." Think what life would be without Christ. If there are difficulties in faith, then remember how darker and deeper the difficulties of no faith at all. To you who believe he is precious, more precious than you know. And to those who have him not, could you honestly and sincerely recommend to another your satisfaction and peace and, most of all, your hope? Yes, without him, there is something missing. More than

something, Someone, the One altogether lovely, the One who would not have you to miss him, the One who is the Way, the only Way, the Truth, and the Life. On his cross Christ confronts us. Some of the Latin crosses have on the reverse the legend, "*Spes Unica,*" "The only hope." Yes, Christ is the only hope for a lost world and the only Savior for a sinner. Without him the great thing, and the Great One, is missing.

"But they went not; for the ships were broken at Ezion-geber."
1 KINGS 22: 48.

X. *"It was a great disappointment"*

Broken Ships

SHE had come with her aunt from a western city to study art in Philadelphia. They secured a modest apartment, and she commenced her work in the Academy of Fine Arts. She had not been long at the Academy before her instructors discovered in her talent of no ordinary nature. She rapidly advanced in her studies and won a traveling fellowship for study in Europe. But just when she was making her preparations to go abroad she fell ill. Her friends thought it only a slight sickness, but the sickness lingered. The doctor said something about her lungs. It would be well for her to stop work and study for a little; only for a time, however, and when she was well she could go back to her art. She dropped her work and remained at home, going out when the weather was favorable. The weeks went by, but strength

did not return. Instead of getting stronger, she grew weaker. Her outings became less frequent; by and by they ceased altogether. She was confined to her room. Still she grew weaker, and at length took to her bed. But the buoyancy and hope that usually accompany her disease were not wanting. In a few weeks she would be all right. The weeks stretched into the months, and she was not all right, but far from it. When I called to see her both she and her aunt knew that it was not all right. She lay upon her bed near the window, where the sunlight poured in, her eyes brilliant and her cheeks glowing with the unnatural internal fire that told of death's approach. As I sat thus by her side, she was able to give me the sketch of her history, as I have given it to you now. I said what anyone else would have said when she had finished her story, seeing that this was the ending of all her bright hopes and promise for distinction in the world of art, "It must have been a great disappointment." "Yes," she answered, "it was a great disappointment."

The next time I called to see her I found that another guest, one who does not tolerate delay, and who makes it unnecessary for another to call, had been there before me.

The ships went not, for they were broken on the rocks. How many ships of hope and ambition have been broken on the rocks! Incidents such as this

are happening about us all the time. Stop for a moment in your rush and hurry and put your ear to the earth and you can hear the slow tramp, tramp, tramp of the army of disappointed, the army of those who have fallen in the battle of life, wounded, beaten, overwhelmed.

"I sing the hymn of the conquered, who fell in the Battle of Life,
The hymn of the wounded, the beaten, who died overwhelmed in the strife."

From this bedside of the dying art student my mind reverted to the story of the book of the Kings of Israel, how Jehoshaphat made ships to go for the gold of Ophir. He was one of the best kings that Israel ever had. He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord; not always, indeed, but, save for these three unhappy alliances with the evil house of Ahab, the balance was on the side of God. The trade winds of his life blew in that direction, although there was an occasional shift. One of his faults was an alliance with wicked Ahab, and then an alliance with Ahab's not better son, Ahaziah. They had heard of the gold of Ophir. Ophir was a name that inflamed the imagination of the kings and princes of that day, as the name of El Dorado, or Peru, or Mexico inflamed the imagination of pioneers in the sixteenth century. Solomon had sent ships to it, and after three years they had come

back laden with ivory, peacocks, sandalwood, almug trees, silver and precious stones; but above all, gold.

At Ezion-geber, on the Red Sea, the two kings built their ships. At length all was ready. The kings, no doubt, were present to see the fleet sail. With the sound of the trumpets, with a flourish of banners and the benediction of royalty, the anchors were hoisted, the sails set, and with a favoring wind the armada sailed out of Ezion-geber down the Red Sea, bound for far-off Ophir. But the ships went not. The storm arose and drove them on the treacherous rocks of the Red Sea. When the next morning dawned, the proud armada lay scattered on the rocks, a tangled mass of tinder and cordage, and those who had sailed on the ships were buried in the deep. That was the end of Jehoshaphat's expedition for gold. "They went not; for they were broken at Ezion-geber."

That saying is the epitaph for many a hope and dream and ambition. It is the final sentence in many a story of the soul's adventure. The keels were laid; the ships were built; the seas were charted; the anchors hoisted; the sails set. But the ships went not. Expeditions of the head and of the heart, some for gold and gain, some for fame and power, and some for knowledge, some for the good of man, and some for love; but they never reached their goal. The ships went not.

I remember a visit I once paid to the coast of Devon and Cornwall. The land breaks off abruptly at the sea, and grim granite walls and huge bowlders marked the dividing line between the dominion of earth and sea. Against those iron cliffs the waves of the Atlantic Ocean, rolling straight in from Labrador, hurl themselves with thunderous reverberation. At almost any place along that coast you can find pieces of broken ships that have been wrecked there. In the churchyards under the gray towers there are never wanting the graves of seamen whose bodies had been washed up on the shore when the sea gave up her dead. Here and there, the artistic figurehead of a gallant ships stood as a gravestone for the members of her crew. So the shores of humanity are strewn with the wreckage of all kinds of ships, all kinds of hopes, desires, and ambitions. They went not; for they were broken at Ezion-geber. This is a fact of life with which religion must deal. You cannot ignore the broken ship, the wrecked argosy, the breakdowns and failures and disappointments of life. What, in the light of Christ's Gospel, can we say?

I. Disappointment Has an Educational and Disciplinary Reaction upon Life

On his second missionary journey St. Paul first desired to go into Bithynia, in that day a very im-

portant province that lay along the Black Sea. But the spirit of Jesus suffered him not. Unable to preach in Asia Minor because the Holy Spirit forbade him, and forbidden by the spirit of Jesus to pass into Bithynia, Paul came down to Troas, across the straits from Europe, wondering what God meant, why all his purposes and plans were frustrated, and his every effort to preach the Gospel met with a "Thou shalt not." But that night he dreamed, and in his dream he saw the man of Macedonia saying, Come over and help us. That dream turned the stream of civilization into a new channel. The seven cities of Asia were forbidden him, and Bithynia was walled up against him, but only that he might turn his steps toward Europe—Europe, the coming world, instead of Asia, the dying world! Athens instead of nameless Black Sea cities; Rome instead of Ephesus. The sentence in the narrative of the Acts is, of course, St. Luke's. But I think he must have written it thus because he heard it on Paul's lips. On some of their journeys, looking back over the way that God had led them, Paul referred to that disappointment about Bithynia. How fortunate it was that he had not been permitted to go there. The spirit of Jesus suffered him not.

It makes a great difference if you can thus catalogue disappointments and find in them, not cruel, remorseless fate, but the spirit of Jesus.

Phillips Brooks went through Harvard College with the expectation and the desire of becoming a teacher. After he was graduated, he secured an appointment in the Boston Latin School, and no man ever failed so completely or ever felt so keenly the humiliation of his failure. With the cruel words of the head master ringing in his ears, "I have never known a man who failed as a schoolmaster to succeed at anything else," the humbled youth left the classroom to pass through a Gethsemane of loneliness and chagrin. But the Christian world rejoices today in that providential failure. It rejoices that the door into that Bithynia schoolroom was closed against him and another door opened into that pulpit of surpassing eloquence and far-reaching influence.

In a churchyard at Brighton, England, there is a garden plot which the workingmen of Brighton, who built the monument, keep free of weeds and fresh with flowers. The name on the monument is that of Frederick Robertson. His father served in the British army during the American War. His boyhood days had been spent playing about the forts at Leith. By temperament and heredity he desired to be an officer in the British army. His name was on the commander in chief's list; but for some reason he was not granted a commission. He then matriculated at Oxford, and at length was ordained to the ministry. The boy's hopes were disappointed;

but the whole Christian world rejoices today that the door into the army was closed, and that he became instead a good soldier of Jesus Christ and the great preacher who spoke to all classes from professors to the workingman. Today the common people, who heard him gladly, make it always summer time about his grave.

No author ever wrote of the family joys and sorrows and affections in such a tender manner or struck the lyre of domestic affections with such a winning touch as did Charles Dickens. Perhaps the fact that his own home was a desert had something to do with that magnificent expression of family hopes and joys and sorrows. There may be gold for others in our own disappointments. "Now you can write," said Hawthorne's loyal and affectionate wife when he came home and told her that he had lost his position at the custom house. "Now you can write," she said as she put the paper and pen in front of him. No one is sorry today that Hawthorne lost his job as the clerk in the custom house.

Late on a May day, I climbed the Walnut Hills, leaving the smoke and grime and warehouses and noise and din of Cincinnati far below me. On the heights all was fair and quiet and lovely, with the flowers blossoming in the springtime, and my own heart soft and tender with the memories of my father and mother and their early associations with

this same Cincinnati. I strolled through the grounds of the Lane Theological Seminary, thinking of Lyman Beecher and his greater son, Henry Ward, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, all associated with that Seminary. It was while her husband was a professor there that Mrs. Stowe got the material and the inspiration for *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* In her letters she tells how that cabin was built out of the sorrows of her own life. "I have been the mother of seven children, the most beautiful and most loved of whom lies buried near my Cincinnati residence. It was at his dying bed and at his grave that I learned what a poor slave mother may feel when her child is torn away from her. In these depths of sorrow which seemed to me immeasurable, it was my own prayer to God that such anguish might not be suffered in vain. There were circumstances about his death of such peculiar bitterness, of what seemed almost cruel suffering, that I felt that I could never be consoled for it unless this crushing of my own heart might enable me to work out some great good to others. I allude to this here, for I have often felt that much that is in that book, *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* had its root in the awful scene and bitter sorrows of that summer. It has left now, I trust, no trace on my mind, except a deep compassion for the sorrowful, especially for mothers who are separated from their children."

When James Buchanan, afterward President of the United States, was a student at Dickinson College, he suffered some keen disappointment as to a college honor or prize. At that time his father wrote him a letter, in which is this fine passage: "Often when people have the greatest prospects of temporal honor and aggrandizement they are all blasted in a moment by a fatality connected with men and things, and no doubt the designs of providence may be seen very conspicuously in our disappointments in order to teach us our dependency on Him who knows all events, and they ought to humble our pride and self-sufficiency."

Disappointments, while they close one door, may open up a greater door for us. But whether they do that or not, they always have in them the possibilities of self-discipline and self-conquest, and as that father wrote to his disappointed son, "they serve to teach us our utter dependency upon God." One has well said: "Disappointment is like a sieve. Through its coarse meshes, small ambitions and hopes and endeavors of the soul are sifted out relentlessly. But the things that are big enough not to fall through are not in the least affected by it. It is only a test, not a finality." The big things—faith, hope, love, courage in our own troubles, kindness in the troubles of others—disappointment cannot

hurt them, but, on the contrary, discovers new charm and beauty and power in them.

II. The Disappointments of the Present Life Certify the Life to Come

For the particular case with which I started, the untimely end of the young art student, there was little comfort to gain from all that I have just explained; namely, how our disappointments often open gateways to greater things, for in her case, at least so far as this world is concerned, it was not so. But such a death raises the great question about life to come. Even those who have done the most and attained unto many of their aims and ambitions must confess at the end to a certain disappointment. There is always a something beyond that they have not found. In one of his tales Barrie writes: "The life of every man is a diary in which he means to write one story and writes another, and his humblest hour is when he compares the volume as it is with what he vowed to make it." There is always a difference between the reach and the grasp.

Immortality does not rest upon argument, and not even upon instinct and longing, but upon the sure revelation of Jesus Christ. But if one would have an argument to lay alongside the fact of revelation, one of the strongest arguments which can be mentioned is that from the incompleteness of this

present life. Whenever I read the answer of the unemployed in the parable of the vineyard, "No man hath hired us," I hear it in the sad refrain of the unappreciated, the disappointed, the countless throng whom life never seemed to call into its vineyard, who never found their place or their niche. As the Master called men at the eleventh hour to go and work in his vineyards, so I think of immortality as God's vineyard, where not only those who toil faithfully and successfully in this life shall find greater and higher labors, but those who had to stand by and wait and watch others work and succeed shall find employment suited to their talents and desires. The hands that might have swayed the rod of empire shall be thrilled with the rod of opportunity and service. The hands that might have waked to ecstasy the living lyre shall find lyres they can strike and harmonies which they can awaken. If knowledge in this life never unrolled her ample page before their eye, hereafter they shall know the truth and increase in knowledge. If poverty, chill penury, repressed their noble rage and froze the genial current of the soul in this life, there his servants shall serve him, and there shall be no discrepancy between desire and opportunity. In the words of Principal Caird: "Man's intellectual and moral endowments are on a scale immeasurably larger than the needs of this present life, more than that is required for any

attainment in knowledge or goodness which even the noblest and best of men reach in their earliest existence; and therefore we can account for the disproportion only by the conception of a future life in which these endowments shall find adequate scope and employment."

Any cut-off or disappointed life raises great questions about the After Here. If man were just a creature without thoughts that lie too deep for tears, without interminable longing after higher and nobler things, if he were only an insect, a pismire, death would not trouble him. It would seem a fitting end. Indeed, he would not think of it at all. But dreaming the dreams which he does dream, and entertaining the hopes which come from afar to visit him, death as the end, the finish, the nothing-further of man's life, must ever be regarded with melancholy and amazement. Our very losses and disappointments are mighty protests against such a summing up, the very cries of pain and grief wrung from the lips of men in this present life come echoing back to us, bearing tidings from afar and reassuring our hearts with the promise of the reverescence of life and all that is good and sacred in the After Here.

"If after the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth me," cried Paul, "if the dead rise not?" His privations, his keeping the body under, his sacrifices, his weariness,

his labors more abundant, his days and nights in prison, and on the deep, his scourgings, lacerations —and all for the sake of an ideal and hope in Christ —what did it all amount to, what had he got out of if, if death was the end?

Look at this old man Moses, standing yonder on the top of Pisgah, on the other side Jordan, his raiment streaming in the wind, gazing with earnest, yearning eye upon the panorama beneath him, the blue mountains, with here and there a crown of snow to the north, before him the palms of Jericho, the plains, the rocky ravines, the rolling uplands, and far in the distance a flash and tumble, the great sea itself. This was the land of promise to which he had led his people. Like an inhalation he drew in all its beauty and glory. But the vision was as brief as an inhalation: "I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither." So Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab according to the word of the Lord, and he buried him in a valley of Moab over and against Bethpeor, and no man knoweth of his sepulcher unto this day.

That unfound grave of Moses, the grave in which he was laid just at the climax of his life and his life's great ambition, is forever a symbol of those unexplained providences and those strange disappointments in human life. How many there are! How

often Pisgah uprears itself in every man's life journey. We see it with our eyes, but we cannot pass over.

Moses was not permitted to cross the Jordan and stand in this life on the soil of the promised land. But now the centuries have passed, and on the Mount of Transfiguration in one of the great moments of the life of that greater Prophet to whom Moses pointed and of whom Moses wrote, Moses, with Elijah, is permitted to come out of the unseen world and stand by the side of Jesus Christ as he speaks with them concerning his atonement which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem. That was a greater honor than to stand in the flesh with Israel's army on the land of Promise. Greater things than we can imagine, God hath reserved for them that love him.

Sursum corda! Lift up your heart. Every shadow that falls across your path tells of a reality and substance beyond the grave. Every heartbreak and disappointment gives you that much clearer title to a room in the Father's house. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the word of the Lord, for as much as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

"By Nebo's lonely mountain
On this side Jordan's wave,

"IT WAS A GREAT DISAPPOINTMENT"

In a vale in the land of Moab
  There lies a lonely grave,
And no man knows that sepulcher,
  And no man saw it e'er,
For the angels of God upturned the sod,
  And laid the dead man there.

O lonely grave in Moab's land!
  O dark Beth-Peor's hill!
Speak to these curious hearts of ours,
  And teach them to be still.
God hath His mysteries of grace,
  Ways that we cannot tell;
He hides them deep, like the hidden sleep
  Of him he loved so well."

"There was standing by the cross, his mother." JOHN 19: 25.

XI. *"I beg to remain in sorrow, his mother"*

THIS was the end of a letter full of grief and heartache. The letter came to me from a woman I did not know, but who had come into the church one Sabbath evening. Briefly her story is this. Her only son is a successful and rising young man in the business world. Admired by men and women alike, his social attractiveness is his peril. When away from home he is in fast, worldly, drinking company. The mother does not say so, but I read between the lines in her letter that her own husband, the young man's father, or another son, perhaps, had gone the same path to ruin. Her soul is distressed lest this son, too, go to his ruin. The mother's heart beats and pleads in every line and word of the letter. "I am so heartbroken over him that at times it seems I cannot pray any more. Yet I feel that in His own time He will save my boy. Please pray for him. Please do not forget my boy. I remain in sorrow, his mother."

Hundreds of letters like that being written all over our land and thousands of such prayers going up to God. It might chance that the man for whom this mother is writing and praying is in the church. Of this, at least, I am sure: there will be those here who have prayed, and are even now praying, for someone whom they tenderly love. This mother's letter opens a door for us to a number of profitable truths.

I. Difficulties in Prayer

The first of these truths to which this letter turns our mind is the difficulties in the way of him who prays. This mother had prayed so often that she was tempted to think it was of no use to pray. With some the difficulty in prayer is a theoretical one; it belongs to the field of logic. If God rules the world by law, if he ordains all things whatsoever come to pass, then what use is there in praying? I cannot persuade God to change his mind or call back his decrees or revoke his own laws. That is the logical difficulty. Another difficulty in prayer is the moral difficulty. I mean the difficulty of the man who has never renounced his sin, who might wish to pray and believes in prayer, yet cannot pray because he feels that his life nullifies and hinders his prayer. If only he could persuade himself to be a better man, he would commence to pray. A third

difficulty is the experimental difficulty. Just commencing my ministry, I went one day to purchase a ticket at the railway station. The agent, learning I was a minister, asked me if I believed in prayer. When I said that I did, he referred to his own case. For years his wife had been an invalid. He had prayed and prayed and prayed, but his wife was not restored to health. It is a question that has come up many a time since. Why is my prayer not answered? That was the difficulty of this mother. She had prayed so many times for the reformation of her son, and that reformation had not been made; therefore, she began to wonder if it was worth while to pray. For most people the *experimental* difficulty is the real one. Few philosophize about prayer: few are so conscientious as to realize that they ought to repent before they pray; but many have prayed, and their prayers have not been answered, and for that reason they are troubled.

This woman's experimental difficulty in prayer was aggravated by the nature of her request. We might pray for certain things or conditions that are good and honorable, but which relate more to our happiness and to our comfort than to the moral world or the spiritual world. If this mother had prayed for her son's health, and it had not been restored, or for her son's success in business, but it had not been granted him, the difficulty would not have been so

great, for God can use ill health and failure in business to the good of man and to his own glory. But that was not what this mother prayed for: she prayed for the reclamation of her son from evil habits that were threatening to destroy his soul. She prayed for his redemption and salvation. In making that prayer she could be sure she was asking what is agreeable to the will of God. God hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He who made man in his image and stamped upon him the divine imprimatur and bestowed the high gifts of conscience, will, and intellect, desires that man shall glorify God with a righteous life. He who gave his Son to die in shame and agony on the cross for man longs for the salvation of man. The mother could be sure, as we cannot be in many of our prayers, that what she sought was in keeping with the will of God. Yet her prayer had not been answered.

If there were just two factors in this problem, there would be no difficulty in solving it. If only the desire of God and the wish of the mother were to be considered, the prayer would certainly be answered. But there is a third factor, the will and the wish of the son. That makes the problem more difficult. God's will is supreme—to that we cling. But man's will is free—to that also we cling. The prayers of the mother cannot be answered until the

will of the son is turned in the direction of that prayer. When the son comes to himself, repents, is converted, for nothing else but that will stay a man on that slippery path which he is treading, then the prayer of the mother will be answered.

Prayer is a mystery, both in its operation and in its power. There is no power like unto it. We cannot limit it or define it. Its very mystery gives us ground for hope. It is not a poor appliance of this world, the extent of the power of which we know; it is a weapon put in our hands by the Eternal Spirit who bids us pray and that earnestly. By his own example and by precept and parable Jesus anticipated all our difficulties in prayer. He foresaw the case of this woman and said: "In spite of all doubts and delays and disappointments, pray on. Always pray and never faint."

On the grave of Phillips Brooks' mother is the verse put there by her sons: "O woman, great is thy faith. Be it unto thee according to thy wish!" That was what Jesus said to the woman who came to ask him to heal her daughter. At first Jesus was silent, and when he did answer her it was in a way that might make one think he did not care whether her daughter lived or died. But in spite of silence, in spite of rebuke, the woman kept on praying, Lord help me! Then Jesus answered: "O woman, great is thy faith. Be it unto thee even as thou wilt!"

You pray, and God answers you not a word. You pray again, and by way of reply you are smitten with some affliction or sorrow. But keep on praying for your son, your daughter, your friend, yourself, for these attitudes of God, as was the case with this woman, may be but introductory stages to a great and complete answer. When you seem the furthest from an answer you may be nearest to it. Even now in the heart of the one for whom you pray there may be the stirring of repentance and faith. That is the thought so nobly phrased in Stephen Phillips' *Mother*—

"O mother, that from thy pure heart each night
Sendest up prayers for me to highest God;
For me who wander without fixed light,
And have not faith to tread where thou hast trod;
Grieve not, though God no answer yet hath given;
He knows that mine is not a lasting doom;
Though Thou be caught up into highest heaven,
And I be banished into outer gloom;
For then the aching absence of thy face
Shall work in me such swift immortal pain,
That I shall struggle through the worlds of space
In burning hope to be with thee again.
And I shall strive for thy white purity
For fear of everlasting losing thee." [1]

II. Sin Always Hurts Another

Sin is a double-edged sword. It injures the trans-

[1] Used by permission of Dodd, Mead & Co., Inc.

gressor and it brings sorrow and misery to others. "I remain *in sorrow,* his mother." The young man enjoyed himself in the hectic pleasures of his fast companions, with perhaps now and then a thought of regret or misgiving about the effect of all this upon his future, yet willing to take his chances. But while he takes his chances, yonder, in the shadow, beyond the midnight glare of his dissipations, stands his mother. "I remain in sorrow, his mother." The son's sin was undoing the man himself; but it was also breaking the mother's heart. Always there is someone in the shadow whom our sin hurts. The classic and moving illustration of that is David's sorrow when they told him that Absalom was dead. Every one of those darts which Joab had driven through that brilliant blackguard's heart had torn its way through the heart of the royal father. Absalom, my son! Peter with an oath denies that he ever knew Christ; but Christ was there in the shadow, hearing all that he said, and speechless in his grief.

We cannot break the moral solidarity of life. No man liveth to himself, and no man sinneth to himself. "They shall look upon him whom they have pierced," is an Old Testament saying which has been used to describe the sorrow and the remorse of those who in this life reject Christ and persecute Him, and there, in the life to come, awaken to deep contrition when they realize who it is they have scorned and

rejected. It is also a parable of every man's experience when, after his sin, he awakens to learn with swift and sudden pain that his sin has pierced others, it may be those whom he has loved with tenderness. When that son awakens from his dreams of evil, the eyes of his soul will look upon her whom he has pierced.

Would that I might write that with a pen of iron upon the heart of every young man and young woman in this congregation tonight. Your sin always strikes someone else besides yourself. It makes a mother write a letter like this one which I have read. It makes a father cry out, "O my son, my son!" I see all kinds of sorrow and all varieties of pain. But this is always the keenest anguish, always the most difficult to minister to, always the nearest to Gethsemane's Garden and Golgotha's Cross—the pain of that heart which has been broken and wounded by the knowledge of the sin of one whom they have loved better than life itself. I know that you would not inflict that pain. Were I to charge you with wilfully inflicting such pain upon a mother, a father, a friend, you would repudiate the charge with burning indignation. So would this son whose mother wrote the letter. Ofttimes the deepest wounds may be inflicted where you little think it and when you least intend it.

III. The Love of God for Man

What I have said about the sorrow of this mother because of the sin of her son leads us to our last point—namely, the yearning love of God for man. This story is a parable of the relationship between man and God. In the New Testament, and often in the Old, it is the father's love that is used as an emblem of the love of God for man. But for you and me who live in this century a far more effective illustration and explanation is the love of a mother for her son. Sometimes I am almost moved to wish, let me say it with reverence, that when Jesus told that blessed parable of the Lost Son he had put a mother instead of a father in it, and that it had been the thought of his mother's home and his mother's house that moved the son to return, and that it had been his mother sitting by the window who saw him when he was yet a great way off. A father's eyes can see far upon such an occasion; but a mother's eyes outrange all others; her arms outreach all others. If the parable stood thus, how true it would be, what a picture it would be of many a home and many a mother and many a son!

There stood by the Cross his mother. When you and your cross come together, who stands closer to that cross than your mother? Who is more interested in your success and happiness? Who will

sympathize more with you in your grief or disappointment? Who will be merrier in the day of your victory? To whom can you go with greater assurance?

So it is that the mother's love for the son is the perfect parable of God's love for man and interest in him. Our sins grieve our God as they grieve our mothers. His interest in us and love for us follows us in all our sins. One day there comes to you a letter or a message from friends of long ago. You had not heard from them for years. Your paths led in different directions and gradually you drifted apart. You recalled them now and then, but began to think that they had lost all interest in you and ceased to care for you. But this message today comes, and it is like a ray of warm sunlight to your heart, because it tells you of their thought and interest and affection.

That is a message that man likes to receive. It is one suited to his disposition. Dr. McCosh describes the extraordinary and sustained popularity of the famous preacher of Scotland, his uncle by marriage, Thomas Guthrie. Critical hearers said he was not logical and that he was not profound. "But," says McCosh, "the people thronged to hear him because they knew he would warm their hearts. Man longs for that. He likes a friend who has a real interest in him. He likes to go to a church where he believes

the people and the minister are interested in him and where his heart will be warmed by the message of the love of God.

Deeper than the mother's interest in her son, or the friend's solicitation for his friend, is God's eternal interest in the souls of men. If a man has a good mother, one thing he can be sure of is this, that he can count on his mother's interest in him and his welfare.

But not all men have good mothers, and many have mothers who now are only a memory, though a blessed memory. But we all have a God in heaven who loves us and who gave his Son to die for us. Whosesoever love grows old, his never grows cold. Whosesoever interest in us passes away, his faileth never.

I leave with you the message of Christ: God's timeless, fadeless, patient, learning love for you and interest in you. Oh, if in but one heart that has been far from God there is now but the faintest stirring of an answer, a deep yearning for a better life, even a look in the direction of the Father's house. Though that may mean but little to your neighbor in the pew, to your companion in pleasures, to your associate in business, to your fellow-student, to your friend who works at your side, yes, even to the members of your family, it means everything to God. He is looking and waiting and yearning for

that very thing. I pray that the Father's heart may be made glad because one of his children whom he loves so faithfully and tenderly has turned from the fickle, illusory, deceptive, cruel love of this world to the love of God.

"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

1 CORINTHIANS 10: 12, 13.

XII. *"You who are above temptation"*

I HAD preached a sermon on temptation.[1] It was suggested by the fragment of a sermon that I had once heard sitting on the steps of a Scottish church on the isle of Bute. As I gazed on the beautiful twilight panorama of sea, mountains, islands, and the sky, this sentence, like a voice from another world, came rolling from the preacher through the open door: "Every man has his own ladder down to hell." This gave me the caption for the sermon on temptation. Shortly afterward I received a letter in which the writer said: " 'Every

[1] See Chapter VI.

man,' you say, 'has his own ladder down to hell.' But what about the woman? She has her temptations just the same as a man, and, if I might say, more. You who have never . . . . are above temptation. We are put on this earth to be tempted. But whether we are strong enough to avoid it, no one but ourselves can answer."

Man, undoubtedly, has temptations about which woman, fortunately, knows nothing, and which, by the fundamental nature of things, are much more intense. But when I said, "Every man has his own ladder down to hell," I used the word "man," not as in contrast with woman, but in the sense of humanity. All human nature is temptable. The comment of the letter had in it two false assumptions. First, that anyone is above or beyond temptation; and second, hinted at, although not plainly stated, that the temptations of this particular person were too strong to be borne and that victory was impossible. Both of these positions are false. No one is exempt from temptation, and yet no one is helpless before temptation.

The first part of the text, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall," is a warning against the universality and subtlety and malignancy of temptation. The second part is of a nature to encourage every tempted soul, telling him that for every temptation there is a way of escape. The first

text warns against presumption. The second text warns against discouragement and despair.

I. No One Is Above Temptation

The tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the midst of the Garden of Eden is a parable of human life, and no one who enters the Garden of Life can escape being tested by the Tree of Temptation.

There is no profit in the discussion of why the providence of God permits temptation. The plain fact of life is that he does. Whatever Christ meant when he said, "Lead us not into temptation," he certainly did not mean that we are to ask for a life unassailed and untempted. He himself did not ask for that, but was made perfect through suffering. The clue to that petition in the Lord's Prayer is in the clause which follows, "but deliver us from evil," literally, "the evil one." It is not difficult to state the moral values of temptation. We cannot think of moral strength and character without temptation, and while we may lament the fall of a tempted man, we can remember that there was no other path by which he could come to strength but by the dangerous path of temptation. Great are the trophies which are won upon this dark and grim battle field. All this is set forth for us as in a parable in the story of the temptation at the beginning of the his-

tory of the human race; and again, in the temptation of Christ, the second Adam, which was a prelude to his redemptive work. There is a saying of Goethe, that talent is formed in solitude, but character in the storms of life. If a man is going to develop talent in any line, he must spend much time by himself. But character is formed in the storms of life and by contact with human nature and the world.

The writer of the letter was mistaken in imagining that anyone was above temptation. Perhaps it would do no harm for one to think of *another* as beyond temptation, but for a man to think of *himself* as above temptation would be almost fatal. One of the powerful English novels of a generation ago tells of the depths into which a man who was heir to the best had fallen. When at length he came to himself and repented, he said this about his fall: "I fell because I deemed myself above temptation."

No man is the same, and temptation is as diverse as human nature. Nevertheless, it follows certain lines of attack, as set forth in the temptation of our Lord—the body, the mind, and the spirit. There are two facts about temptation which make it doubly dangerous. The first is the unlikely temptation. We are all conscious of certain downward tendencies and inclinations. There, we say, we could be tempted, be in danger, and possibly fall. But along other lines a man says to himself: "There is no danger.

That sort of thing would make no appeal to me." Yet this very temptation may prove to be the fatal one. "Is thy servant a dog?" exclaimed Hazael when the prophet Elisha sketched his career in crime. Yet, as soon as he went out from the presence of the prophet he began to perform all that had been predicted for him. A man may fall where he thinks he is safest and strongest. Moses was a meek man, and yet arrogance and anger overcame him. David had a wonderful sense of God, and yet animalism engulfed him. Peter was naturally a brave man, but fell before the pointed finger of a serving maid. The safe thing for us all is to remember that we share human nature, and that for human nature no temptation and no fall is impossible or unthinkable. Rather, we ought to say to ourselves, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

A second dangerous fact about temptation is the suddenness, the unexpectedness with which it may strike. It is one thing to know of some dangerous inclination or appetency in our nature and be taking measures against it before it makes its final assault. We have time to rally our scattered outposts and blow the trumpet of resistance. But it is a different thing when, suddenly, as the devil did with Christ, in a moment of time, temptation shows to us all its kingdoms and flashes before our eye and mind all the lure and fascination, the glitter and the delight

of evil. It comes upon a man before recollection and judgment have opportunity to set themselves against the blow. If the man has not disciplined himself by prayer and watching before that moment, there is little likelihood that he will stand before the tumultuous assault of the evil one.

None can overestimate the diversity, the subtlety, the charm, and the urge of temptation. It flows through human life like a subterranean river. While seed time and harvest have followed each other on the earth above in quick rotation, while kingdoms have risen and fallen again, the river of temptation, always the same, flows darkly and rapidly through humanity. Temptation breaks on the shores of human nature like the ocean. Now that ocean is calm and peaceful, gently heaving its breast, as if asleep, bearing not the least trace of dangerous and destructive power; and now it is raging in its fury. So is the ocean of temptation which lies around the coasts of human nature. How many shipwrecks strew its shores or litter its dark and unsounded bottom! Yes, Christ was not speaking without a reason when he said, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation."

II. Dangerous Though It Is, Temptation Can Be Met and Conquered

"There hath no temptation taken you save such

as is common to man." Paul's thought here was not primarily to tell tempted people that all men were tempted like as they were, but that no man was tempted beyond the power of resistance. The meaning is, "There hath no temptation taken you save such as man can bear." You and I are subject to temptations; but they are a man's temptations, and we do not need the strength of an angel to meet them and conquer them.

Those who have yielded to temptation are tempted, again, to make light of their fault by saying that the temptation was greater than they could bear, that they were swept along by a force without and beyond themselves, and which could no more be resisted than a chip floating on the surface can resist the angry foaming sweep of a swollen river. This is not a true account of the situation. Man is not weak. He has awful powers lodged in him if he will use them. But they must be used in conjunction with God.

"God," Paul says, "is faithful, and will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able." Paul does not say here that temptation can be conquered because man is strong, but because God is faithful to those who put their trust in him. Just as in the redemption of our souls from sin, so in every other department of our religion, it is not what man can do or plan, but what God will do, that our hope lies.

Traveling through the mountains of Norway, or in other rugged countries, I have often looked at the forbidding barrier of mountains in front and wondered where the road could find a way through the great rampart. The opening would not disclose itself until we were almost up against the face of the cliff. Then the road wound its way through the pass. The pass was always there, no matter how lofty or rugged the mountains. So for the tempted soul there is always a way out, a way of escape, if he will take it. All that temptation can do is to present to a man a choice, and let him decide whether he will lower and degrade himself or conquer the temptation and decorate himself. Temptation is man's opportunity for evil or for good. Of itself, it is nothing until connected to the will of man.

It is not that God proves faithless when men fall, but that we ourselves have proven traitors to ourselves. Looking back now over the past days, or weeks, or months: when you consider how you have neglected God's proffered help—prayer, worship, sacraments, the Scriptures, and meditation—what else could you have expected than failure? What easier victim could temptation have found? And if unscathed by temptation, it is only because you were not assailed, and not because you had prepared yourself to meet it.

"When thou passest through the fire it shall not

kindle upon thee." The fire of temptation cannot hurt a man who walks with God any more than Nebuchadnezzar's furnace could hurt the three Hebrew lads at whose side walked a Fourth One, like unto the Son of Man. There is a legend of a godly woman who was shut up in a gloomy prison for forty years. With a piece of iron she had written and cut into the stones, wherever there was space sufficient for it, the words: "Resist! Resist! Resist!" This was to encourage and strengthen herself and to inspire those who after her might come into that dungeon. Satan is strong, but he fights in chains, and there is one thing which he cannot overcome, and that is the resistance of one who fears God and shuns to do evil.

There is one thing about temptation which, I fear, is often left unspoken in our public comments upon it, and that is the tempting of others. The Prince of Darkness does his work through other men, just as God does his work in this world through men who hear his voice. Satan is the ultimate source and author of temptation, yet it is sadly and fearfully true that men deliberately tempt other men. One black soul likes to bring a white soul into the same condition. One fallen person has a diabolical delight in bringing another down to the same level. Christ measured the depth of this sin when he said that for the man who made one of his disciples to

stumble, it were better that a millstone had been hung around his neck and that he had been drowned in the depths of the sea. However much we have been marred and scarred by the tempter's shafts, let us at least see to it that ours shall not be the guilt of temping another soul. If in hell there are gradations of punishments, as the words of Jesus about few and many stripes would seem to indicate, then hell's severest retributions must surely fall upon the souls of those who have deliberately and malignantly tempted other men.

Although so many tragedies and sorrows gather about this fact of temptation, here also there is glory and the beauty of strength. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." There is no crown to which the brow of man can aspire comparable to that bright and unfading crown which rests upon the head of him who has overcome temptation. This is the purest cup of life's joys. No one can bestow this honor upon you. No one can pray it on you. No one can wish it upon you. It will be won only by your own courage, faith, and endurance. Mark and Matthew tell us in the beautiful poetry of their Gospels that when Jesus had overcome the temptation in the wilderness the angels came and ministered unto him. "Then the devil leaveth him and

angels came unto him." Sometimes the devil leaves us broken, degraded, besmirched, and burning with remorse, while guardian angels with averted countenance flee away, crying: "Fallen! Fallen! Fallen!" But the souls who like Jesus have flung themselves for refuge upon the Eternal God, and overcome temptation and escaped from the Evil One, they know what it is to talk with the angels!

"It was about the tenth hour."
JOHN 1: 39.

XIII. *"The tenth hour struck for me this evening"*

SEVEN years ago I preached a sermon which I called "The Tenth Hour." The sermon was suggested by the fact narrated by St. John in his Gospel that it was about the tenth hour of the day when he and Andrew first met Jesus. John was an old man when he wrote the story, but he never forgot that day or that hour. He leaned on Christ's breast at the Supper; he was with him on the Mount of Transfiguration, and saw him in the day of his Resurrection, and in the vision of Patmos saw him standing in glory amid the seven golden candlesticks, and seated upon the throne of a redeemed world; but the great hour in the religious history of John was the tenth hour of that day when, by the shores of the Jordan, he first saw Christ and heard him speak to him and to Andrew.

The purpose of the sermon was to show how there are turning points in a man's life, and how what we

do, or say, or will, or accept, or refuse, influences our life ever after. At the conclusion of the sermon I said: "This may be a tenth hour for some life. Let that bring a solemn earnestness into our preaching and praying, the thought that we speak now to some soul whose tenth hour is now beginning to strike." I was drawing the bow at a venture, but the arrow found its mark, for I was indeed speaking to at least one soul whose tenth hour was beginning to strike. The next week I received a letter which told of a dark struggle, a great fear, and the joy of deliverance. Of the soul which passed through this tenth hour, suffice it to say that it had been called upon to drink as bitter a cup as is ever pressed to human lips. It was a trial which involved bitter disappointment, the surrender of what was most precious, and the incomparable pain of heartlessness and faithlessness. This soul knew that it was suffering; but the actual peril that it was in, the crisis through which it was passing, was, by the Spirit of God, brought home by the refrain of the text, "It was about the tenth hour." The soul saw its peril and rallied all its powers. The letter to me was one of gratitude, the best salary of any minister, but also a letter of self-revelation. The unforgettable thing in that letter was this: "For some time I have been on the verge of a pit, the pit of self-destruction. In other words, the tenth hour struck for me this

evening. I feel that I am past the crisis, and I am praying for strength to brace me up and keep my wandering footsteps from that pit."

The letter brings to mind what even the dullest soul must feel at times, that there are hours in life which stand out above all others. One of the thrilling things in history is how the massive gates of circumstance have turned upon the smallest hinge, and how, to us, chance events, under the hand of God, have decided the fate of nations and the course of history. Napoleon used to say that in every battle there was a period of ten or fifteen minutes which decided the issue of the conflict. Certainly in the battle of life there are moments and hours which, so far as we can tell, determine our history: "hours when the spirit in which we lived, the step we took, the word we uttered, or what at that moment we thought, resolved, accepted, rejected, did, or did not, gave a complexion to our whole being here, and it may be, hereafter." These are the tenth hours when a whole life seems packed into a single hour of revelation and destiny.

Although these hours strike without warning and come unannounced, for, as the ancients used to put it, "the feet of the gods are shod with wool," we can prepare ourselves for the right choice and the true action in such hours by reflecting upon them, what they are, whence they come, and what is in-

volved in them. They remind us, too, of the fact that there is another will than ours at work in this world and in our lives, and that the Divine plan takes in the whole history of our lives. "The lot is cast in the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." We seem to draw and act as we please; but there is a higher mind arranging and disposing the matter. We need not stop to perplex ourselves with the effort to explain how these two things, your own independent and responsible choice, and the sovereign plan of God, are to be reconciled. Our duty is to accept both truths as revealed in the Scriptures and illustrated in every human life. There is comfort in the belief in an overruling Providence; but there is also a warning and an inspiration in the thought of our freedom to choose, and the effect such choice has upon our life here and our life hereafter. Let us think, then, of some of these destiny-making hours, which we may call the tenth hours of life.

I. Hours of Shock and Depression of Soul

Wellington used to speak of what he called "three o'clock in the morning" courage. What a man thinks, does, determines, when things are at their worst makes or mars his future. The writer of the letter from which I have quoted was in the midst of such an hour. Bitter disappointment, broken trust,

the fading of cherished hopes precipitated a crisis. It does for every soul so tried, for the soul must choose heroic endurance, forgiveness, or hate, bitterness, and despair. This soul had almost chosen the latter, when it recovered itself on the very brink of the pit of destruction.

This blow at the citadel of the soul may come through bereavement. I always think more highly of the spirit which tenants this sin-ruined temple of man when I see that spirit enduring to the end, and triumphantly, all the battering gales of sorrow and heartache. When the brightness has suddenly been extinguished, when life's interests by whose flame you warmed and cheered your soul have gone out, leaving only the dull, cold, gray ashes on the hearth, then a critical hour has struck for your soul. What will it do or choose then? Will it give up? Will it forget that whatever has been swept away in the general wreck and ruin, the duty still remains? Will the soul surrender, or will it call upon God and say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him"? Will it be able to say what Milton said in the sonnet to Cyriack Skinner?

"Yet I argue not
Against Heaven's hand or will, nor bate a jot
Of heart or hope; but still bear up and steer right onward."

Again, this shock of soul may be occasioned by

our own failure and breakdown. It is bad enough to be wronged and betrayed by another, but worst of all to be wronged and betrayed by your own self. Then is the momentous hour when all our earnest prayers and firm resolves and oft-searchings of heart seem ghastly in their impotence as they lie strewn about our feet. Dare we trust ourselves again? If under favorable circumstances we have failed so dismally, what hope is there of a better performance tomorrow? No hour is so critical as that tenth hour when a soul contemplates its own breakdown and failure, when it must say bitterly with itself, "The good that I would, that I have not done, and the evil that I would not, and thought I could never do, that I have done." What will you do then? Will you let the ship of your soul drift before the wind which has struck it, or will you contend against the storm? Will you accept this last defeat and failure as final, or will you rise again to your feet, to cry anew, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy, for though I fall, I shall rise again"?

II. The Hour of Temptation

The Gospels properly place the temptation of Jesus at the beginning of his ministry. That was the moral prelude to the work of redemption. *Paradise Regained,* the unread sequel to *Paradise Lost,* does not come to an end, as one might at first think,

with an account of the crucifixion, the resurrection, the second advent, but with the victory of Jesus over Satan in the temptation in the wilderness. That was the critical and testing hour in the ministry of Christ, for had he failed there, he had lost his right and power to become our Redeemer. That first victory made possible all that followed.

The hour of temptation, particularly first temptations, is critical for the soul, for what a man does or chooses there may determine his character and his future. There he may lay a granite foundation upon which he can build for years to come, or there he may inflict on himself a wound which time can never heal. How much a man can gain in the moment of temptation resisted, and alas, how much a man can lose in the moment of temptation yielded to! It will take years to build up a fine character, but in a second of time the wrong answer, the wrong step in the presence of temptation will lay that noble structure in the dust. Esau made the wrong answer, and just for the sake of a momentary pang of hunger, the appetite of an hour; but once the wrong bargain had been made, no long searching and no bitter tears could get back what he had thrown away in that hour of temptation. Judas made the wrong choice in his hour, and in vain remorse did he fling the blood money down on the table of the Scribes and Pharisees. So men are tempted to quench the

divine spark within them and cast to the dogs that which is incalculably, indefinably precious, so precious that the blood of Christ was shed to redeem it from sin and death.

I wonder if now, all unconsciously, I am beholding in some life that most thrilling of all spectacles upon which man or angel or demon can ever look, the struggle between good and evil for the mastery of an immortal soul? We can think of the redeemed in heaven, guardian angels, if such there be, with bated breath watching the progress of such a struggle, rejoicing when the soul chooses the good, but sorrowing most of all when the deluded soul is overpowered of Satan and left marred, enslaved, and forever spoiled. If, indeed, as surely I am, I am speaking now to some sorely tempted man or woman, let me bring to your mind the prayers of those who have loved you, the hopes and salutations of all the company of the good, the anxious contemplation and prayerful intercession of the redeemed in heaven, and above all, the pleading death of Christ for you on the Cross, and his prayer for you as he prayed for Peter, that your faith fail not. When Jesus had won his great battle with temptation, we read in the beautiful poetry of the evangelist that the "devil leaveth him for a season, and angels came and ministered unto him." Covet the visit and the ministry of those angels! If not real angels, at

least the angels which rise out of the depths of a man's own heart and conscience, to say to him when he has won his battle, "Well done!"

III. The Hour of Christ's Approach to the Soul

The saddest stories are the stories which have never been written, because they are the stories of men to whom Christ through the Holy Spirit drew nigh. He called for them, stood and called, as the lover in the Song of Songs, but stood and called in vain. There is no greater moment in a man's life than when he feels a gentle impulsion toward God. The Spirit speaks many languages, and Christ has many secret paths to the door of a man's heart. He may come by the path of sickness, when the powers of life are spent, and dimly flickers the sinking flame of life; or he may approach through some one's death, or through the viewless winds of memory, or in the quiet hush of meditation or worship, when all the stars of our spiritual nature begin to glow and our whole nature has Godward tendencies; or he may come through storm and tempest and shipwreck, and in the quick flashing of his judgments; or he may come in the accents of a sermon such as this. God grant that he may!

When they told poor blind Bartimaeus, sitting by the roadside at the gates of Jericho, that Jesus of

Nazareth was passing by, he cried out, "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me!" That was his hour, his tenth hour. And when they said to him, "Arise, he calleth for thee," he arose and, blind as he was, ran unto him. Jesus of Nazareth passeth by! What a moment for the soul! Never again did Jesus pass by Jericho. Perhaps he will not pass your way again. Arise! He is calling for thee. Rise up to meet him! This may be your hour!

John could never forget that tenth hour when he first saw Jesus and heard him say, "Come and see." He heard John the Baptist say, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world." That was, still is, ever will be, the great thing about Christ, the thing that interested the Baptist and made John and Andrew follow Christ; the thing that takes more space in the New Testament than anything else; the thing that the apostles declared, that Paul loved to preach; that generations of believers have made their only hope and confidence; the thing that will be the theme of heaven's song and celebration, that Christ is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. All else you may hear of Christ is of relative unimportance compared with this. He can take away your sins! No other can. Is he speaking to you now and saying, "Give me thine heart"? Then, this is your hour. Be swift to answer him! By your quick and

wise choice make this hour as memorable in the calendar of your life as that tenth hour was for John when he first saw and followed Christ.

Let me close with those words with which I closed a sermon on this subject seven years ago, when I found that I was speaking to one for whom the tenth hour was even then striking: "This may be a tenth hour for some life. Who knows? Let that bring a solemn earnestness into our preaching and praying, the thought that we speak now to those whose tenth hour is now beginning to strike."

"Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God."
Acts 14: 22.

XIV. *It takes tribulation to make a man*

THE frequency of the requests for this sermon, the different kinds of persons from whom the requests come, the quick consumption of printed issues of it, bear witness to the fact that its subject lies very close to life. With all the sunshine and joy and pleasure and song that there is in life, men are living under a dispensation of trial and tribulation. We are born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. This is why a sermon on tribulation will ever be a sermon from life. Even in heaven tribulation will still be our theme, for the fact of tribulation will explain much that we see and hear there: "These are they that have come up out of great tribulation."

"It takes tribulation to make a man!" The remark was made to me by a friend at whose side I was sitting in a crowded car. We had been discussing a popular writer: how a serious note had been

coming into his books; how in one book, where he traced a moral awakening and a moral development, it was generally supposed that he was describing his own life; how sorrow and adversity had awakened into life the spiritual nature that was in him. "Yes," declared my friend, bringing his fist down upon his knee, "it takes tribulation to make a man!"

It does. It takes tribulation to make anything worth while. It took tribulation to make this white marble pulpit upon which the Sacred Volume rests. Without tribulation it had been an ugly and huge block in the face of the hill. Tribulation blasted it loose from its home; tribulation cut it and chiseled it into this elegant form; tribulation scraped and polished it until its dark stains disappeared and it became as white as snow.

Tribulation made these Corinthian columns. The mighty monarch of the forest in Wisconsin or Georgia felt the fierce blows of the ax, until at length it fell with a vast sigh to the earth, leaving a lonely place against the sky. Tribulation cast it into the river and floated it to the sawmills; tribulation sawed it and cut it and shaped it and hammered it. But there it now stands, recalling the temple of Olympian Zeus and holding the dome over our heads as we worship the invisible God.

There is a kingdom of usefulness, of beauty, of power, of sympathy, of love, of faith, of God. But

there is only one path by which we can enter that kingdom, and that is by the path of tribulation. By many tribulations we must enter into the Kingdom of God.

I. Tribulation Reveals What Is in a Man

We need to know ourselves before we can make anything strong and good out of ourselves. Mariners speak of a ship "finding herself." The only way in which a ship can find herself is by launching out into the deep and encountering the storm, the whirlwind, and the gale. Man finds himself in tribulation. One of the cousins of John Brown in a letter speaks of a remark made by his famous relative one day when the theory of human perfection was being discussed. Meaning that you could never judge a man's true character until you saw him in the midst of trial, he said: "We never know ourselves till we are thoroughly tried. As the heating of an old smooth coin will make the effaced stamp visible again, so the fire of temptation reveals what is latent even to ourselves." Our true nature is much of the time hidden, buried, clamped down out of sight. But the touch of tribulation commands our true self to stand forth. Then we see ourselves stripped of all disguise; and we see others, too. This sudden epiphany of character may not always be pleasant or reassuring to ourselves or to others.

But it can be, it ought to be, useful. It teaches us where to build up our walls and fortify our soul. In a moment of trial or temptation you may learn important truth about yourself which years of careful observation in ordinary moods would not have revealed. You see there is weakness where you thought there was strength; you discover a lurking passion or appetite that you never before imagined could have power or influence upon your life. It is a flashlight of self, not a posed and prepared self, but the natural self, that tribulation gives you; and it is a portrait that you can always study with profit.

II. Tribulation Gives the Man Strength

Whatever it may reveal, the tendency of tribulation is to form strength of character. The tried man is the strong man, not the untried man. Thomas Guthrie after he left Edinburgh pursued scientific studies at the Sorbonne, in France. In the chemistry lecture one day the professor, lecturing on iron, produced a Damascus blade. "To put it to the trial, he placed the sword in the hands of a very powerful man, his assistant, desiring him to strike it with all his might against a bar of iron. With the arm of a giant the assistant sent the blade flashing around his head, and then down on the iron block, into which, instead of being shivered like glass, it imbedded itself, quivering, but uninjured."

The lecturer stated that he believed these swords owed their remarkable temper to the fact that the iron of which they were made was smelted by the charcoal of a thorn bush that grew in the desert. The life that has had thorns in it, that has had its blade tempered with the ashes of the thorns, the trial, the adversity, the temptation, is the strong, the flashing, the penetrating, the conquering blade.

Speaking of the place of adversity in the making of a useful man, Professor Conklin, in his book on *Heredity,* writes: "What is needed in education more than anything else is some means of system which will train the powers of self-discovery and self-control. Easy lives and so-called good environment will not arouse the dormant powers. It usually takes the stress and strain of hard necessity to make us acquainted with our hidden selves, to rouse the sleeping giant within us. How often it is said that *worthless* sons of worthy parents are mysteries; with the best of heredity and environment they amount to nothing, whereas the sons of ignorant farmers, blacksmiths, tanners, and backwoodsmen, with few opportunities and with many hardships and disadvantages, become world figures. Probably the inheritance in these last cases named was no better than the former, but the environment was better."

Men without tribulation, without struggle and trial, are marred men. It is the tribulation that

makes the man. It makes the church. I never fear the influence of a religion which denies the one thing that makes men, nations, and churches great —suffering, pain. It knows no travail. It kneels in no Gethsemane. When we sit at ease in our comfortable churches, with a freedom to worship, which in too many cases has been turned into a license to neglect worship, we do well to remember the generations of steadfastness and endurance and suffering that lie back of us; how other men have labored and we have entered into their labors. In our world, with the fearful losses and sufferings of the great war, we heard more of justice and generosity and brotherly love and the family of the nations than we hear now that the war is over. This is because "Calvaries and crucifixions take deepest hold of humanity—the triumphs of might are transient—they pass and are forgotten—the sufferings of right are graven deepest on the chronicle of nations."

There is an old Greek story of a soldier under Antigonus, who had a disease, and one that was extremely painful, likely at any time to destroy his life. In every campaign he was in the forefront of the hottest battle. His pain prompted him to fight in order to forget it, and his expectation of death at any time made him court death on the martial field. His general, Antigonus, so admired the brav-

ery of the man that he had him cured of his malady by a renowned physician. From that moment the valiant soldier was no longer seen at the front. He avoided danger instead of seeking it, and sought to protect his life instead of risking it on the field. His tribulation made him fight well. His health and comfort destroyed his usefulness as a soldier.

Were you relieved of some burden, or healed of some disease, or set free from some worry, you might lose in moral and spiritual power and influence. The ore hidden deep in the bowels of the earth is of no value till it has been digged thence and smelted and purged and hammered into the forms that man can use. We must expect to pass through the hands of the miner and the smelter and the steelworker before we are strong and useful.

III. Tribulation Creates Sympathy

In a recently published article a prominent newspaper editor of the South tells what tribulation did for him. He was often bitterly attacked, and answered railing with railing and reviling with reviling. He was successful from a business standpoint, but he lived in an atmosphere of bitterness and scorn and belligerency. One day he was taken sick, and for weary weeks lay at the point of death. In the great silence and quiet of the antechamber of death he had time to look into the heart of things. When

he was convalescent he saw about him the flowers that friends had sent, heard his wife read telegrams, letters, and repeat messages that had come, and how the churches, which he had long attacked because he thought they had attacked him, had prayed for him. He emerged from the shadow country a new man. "I still walk," he says, "down the streets of Elizabeth City, and to all appearances I may seem the same to all my neighbors. But I am not the same. My little excursion into the Valley of the Great Shadow, and the revelation of the beauty of human nature that it brought me has softened me and made me a more humble, a more grateful, and a more reverent individual. There has come back to me a line which I read years and years ago, and which had little meaning for me at the time: 'In a world where death is, I have no time for hate.' "

Margaret Ogilvy is one of the fairest tributes ever paid to a mother. The first chapter in that moving story is entitled, "How My Mother Got Her Soft Face." She had the Scottish mother's ambitions for her son's advancement in the intellectual world. Her oldest boy had gone far away to school. His younger brother remembered him only as a merry-faced lad who ran like a quirrel up a tree and shook the cherries into his lap. When he was thirteen the terrible news came that he was very ill. The whole family trooped down the brae to the wooden station

to see her off on her journey to get between death and her boy. Just after the train had gone, the father came out of the telegraph office and said huskily, "He's gone!" "From that day," writes the son, "I knew my mother forever. When she got home the first thing she expressed a wish to see was the christening robe, and she looked long at it and then turned her face to the wall. That is how she got her soft face and her pathetic ways and her large charity, and why other mothers ran to her when they had lost a child. 'Dinna greet, poor Janet,' she would say to them; and they would answer, 'Ah, Margaret, but you're greeting yourself.' "

That is how all mothers get their soft faces, and all men their soft voices and women their soft touch. They have "greeted" themselves. Before Ezekiel commenced to preach and to teach the people in their captivity he sat silent among them for seven days. "I sat where they sat." Pain is a mystery; suffering is an enigma in God's universe. The man who glibly tries to tell the meaning of that which God hath hidden is a fool. But although we may not know the meaning, we can understand some of the uses of pain. One of these uses is that it awakens and gives opportunity to sympathy. The sufferings of one man evoke sympathy in another. The parable of the Good Samaritan is a lovely story; but the "certain man" had to fall among thieves and be

stripped and left for dead before the story could be told. The poor man who lay bleeding and groaning by the roadside gave the Good Samaritan his chance for the immortality of kindness. The night gives the star its chance. Tribulation gives this gentle, angelic, ministering spirit in man its chance. Undoubtedly, much of the charm of the Christian message lies in the fact that our Savior was a suffering Savior, that he trod his wine press alone, and that he himself was made perfect through suffering. Having suffered himself, we believe that he is able to succor them that are in tribulation. That is the fadeless charm of his cross. His sufferings invest him with mysterious winsomeness. It is the man who has suffered who becomes invested with attraction for other souls.

"Is it not strange, the darkest hour
That ever dawned on sinful earth,
Should touch the heart with softer power
To comfort than an angel's mirth?
That to the Cross the mourner's eyes should turn,
Sooner than where the stars of Christmas burn."

IV. Tribulation Purifies and Refines Man

It sets free the soul that is in him. By tribulation man learns that he is a living soul. As one cuts upon a white cameo the image of a deity or a fair woman, so the chisel of tribulation slowly cuts upon

a man's life the divine character. In my university days I used to walk in the early spring mornings by the shore of a beautiful lake. Its waters were as clear as crystal and its banks were thick with forests. The beach was strewn with rocks and bowlders. But they were ugly and irregular. It is not the gentle lapping of the waves of the inland lake which grinds and polishes the bowlders into white and smooth and rounded pebbles. It takes the grinding and the tossing and the crushing of the ocean breakers to do that; and there it is, by the side of the ocean, and not upon the shore of the lake, that you find the fair and shapely stones.

Henry Ward Beecher, who himself came up out of the severest kind of tribulation which can befall mortal man, has a noble paragraph on the subject: "No man can enter into the Kingdom of God without strife. No virtue can be wrought out without strife. Our virtues are like crystals hidden in rocks. No man shall find them by any soft ways, but by the hammer and by fire. If there is anything which is to endure the fear of death, and the strifes of the eternal world, it is that to which we come by suffering. And we are to account nothing too heavy, nothing too sharp, nothing too long in this life that shall bring us at last, crowned and robed and sceptered, into the presence of our own God to be participators of his immortality."

Our tribulations are slowly grinding out in us the forms of divine character. It is a long and painful process, but there is no other way. "In your suffering," said Jesus, "ye shall win your souls." We are not here to make money, to find an easy berth, to be decorated with honors and to drift down placid streams between flowering banks. We are here for just one purpose—to make souls out of ourselves, to win our souls, to grow in likeness to our God. There is just one way by which we can do that—it is the way of tribulation. There is a Kingdom of God prepared for our souls; but by many tribulations shall we enter into that kingdom.

Take, then, your thorn in the flesh, your smarting wound, your festering hurt, your grievous burden, your disappointment that never grows old, your cross, your thorny crown and look at it anew through the glass of this great truth, that it is by such experiences, through tribulation, that we become Christlike and Godlike, that we enter into the Kingdom of Heaven:

"My life is but a weaving
Between my God and me;
I may but choose the colors—
He worketh steadily.
Full oft He worketh sorrow,
And I, in foolish pride,
Forget He sees the upper,
And I the under side."

Is there no other way? Can I not arrange to enter into that Kingdom by some other gate, along some other path, than this narrow path and this straight gate of tribulation? Although so many others fought to win the prize of the Kingdom of God, can I not secure it without a fight? Although so many others have "sailed through bloody seas" to reach this land of God, can I not in some way be carried there "on flowery beds of ease"? No, my brother; there is no exception. In this warfare there is no discharge. Through much tribulation we must —MUST—enter into the Kingdom of God.

The recent event which has again suggested this theme to me was a visit I paid to a woman who had been grievously ill. She had been taken from one hospital to another, and back to her home, and then from the home back to the hospital. This time she was in her own home, the foot of the bed lifted higher than the head, and her face plainly traced with the lines of suffering and emaciation. After a visit and a prayer, she took my hand as I rose to go and said, "My sufferings have brought me closer to God." The words were spoken slowly, deliberately, with an air of finality. It was the sure verdict of her heart and mind. Hard and weary as had been the days through which she had passed, they had brought her nearer God. There was an accent, too, as if she meant to say that this was the great thing

in life, not what we have, or think, or do, but that we should come close to God. Yes, closer to God, nearer to God, whatever be the path, whatever the cost, that, and that alone, is the great thing in life.

"Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee!
E'en though it be a cross
That raisteth me,
Still all my song shall be,
Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee."

"There is a sin unto death. I do not say that he shall pray for it."
1 JOHN 5: 16.
"The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." 1 JOHN 1: 7.

XV. *The unpardonable sin*

"There are some things for which one can never be forgiven"

THERE are some things for which one can never be forgiven." It was the reply made to me by one whom I had invited to believe on Jesus Christ and publicly confess him before men by uniting with his Church. She was disturbed by the recollection of some past transgression, and the thought of that sin, instead of leading her to throw herself upon the mercies of Christ, was keeping her away from him. There was one element of good in the answer: It showed that the one who made it understood that uniting with the Church and receiving the communion was not just a start on a better road and a promise to follow Christ as Lord and Master, but above and beyond and before all that, a public confession that Christ died for our sins and that we receive his pardon and cleansing forgiveness by repentance and faith alone. In these days of

loose talking and thinking about the Christian Church and what it stands for, it was refreshing, even though there was in it the sadness of rejection, to hear this person who stood aloof from the Cross and the Church speak in a way which showed she understood that becoming a Christian means believing in Christ for the forgiveness of all our sins. That much was good.

But there was much in the answer that revealed a misunderstanding of the power and scope of divine forgiveness. This person, harassed by the memory of some dark transgression, drew back from church membership and refused to accept Christ as her Savior on the ground that she had committed a sin for which there was no forgiveness. The answer is, of course, an unusual one, for the chief difficulty today is not that men feel themselves too great sinners to come into the church and believe on Jesus Christ, but that they do not feel themselves to be sinners at all, and see no good reason why they need to believe on Christ as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Nevertheless, it is a state of mind occasionally met with, and a discussion of this answer will give opportunity to review the Scriptural teaching upon this great subject of sin, and with special reference to what is commonly called "The Unpardonable Sin."

In this passage from which I take my text the

apostle is treating of the subject of prayer, and how a Christian who believes in the Name of the Son of God can make bold to ask God for anything that is according to his will and be sure that God will hear him. Among other things for which a man might ask God, he speaks of the forgiveness and reclamation of a sinner. If more of us prayed for that and prayed less for the advancement of our personal interests and comforts, there might be more sinners saved and reclaimed. He says that if we see a man sinning against God and pray for him God may be pleased to convert and save that man. Then comes the appalling addendum and limitation with which the Apostle of Love fences our use of the great power of intercession: "There is a sin unto death. I do not say that he shall pray for it." It is as if he had said: "Make use of your prayers for men who are out of Christ, or who in any way are sinning against God. Pray for everybody and anybody, with this one exception—that man who has sinned the sin unto death. To pray for him is idle, for he cannot be forgiven."

It is fortunate that one Scripture explains and illuminates another. Reading this passage we at once think of the solemn words of Christ, how "every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. And whosoever shall speak a word against

the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world nor in that which is to come."

At first hearing of that, one might conclude that an awful pre-eminence is here given to the Holy Spirit, that he occupies a more august station than the other members of the Adorable Trinity, so that while a sin against God the Father might be forgiven, or one against God the Son, a sin against God the Holy Spirit can never be forgiven. But such a conclusion would be unreasonable and not in keeping with the teaching of the Scriptures.

Henry Ward Beecher commences a sermon on this subject of the Unpardonable Sin by saying: "There is much anxiety and very little knowledge on this important subject." And Thomas Chalmers begins his great sermon on the same theme by saying: "Let us never suspend the practical influence of what we do know by idly rambling in a vain and impertinent pursuit after what we do not know." The whole subject is relieved of much of its obscurity when we consider carefully the circumstances under which Jesus uttered these words. In brief, the circumstances were as follows: Passing through the cornfields on the Sabbath Day, Jesus and the disciples, being hungry, plucked the ears and began

to eat. For this Jesus was roundly censured by the Scribes and Pharisees. Going from them into the synagogue, he found a man with a withered hand, perhaps brought there on purpose to see if Jesus would heal him on the Sabbath Day. This Jesus promptly did, first asking the Scribes and Pharisees if a man was not of much more value than a sheep, which, if it fell into a ditch on the Sabbath Day, would at once be rescued by its owner. After this rebuke they took counsel how they might destroy him. The more graciously Christ worked in their midst the more they hated him. Shortly thereafter, perhaps on the same Sabbath Day, Jesus healed a poor wretch who was blind, dumb, and possessed of a devil. The common people at once saw in the miracle the evidence of a superior personality and exclaimed one to another, "Can this be the son of David?" But the Pharisees, when they heard of it, said: "This man doth not cast out demons, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons." By way of response Jesus showed the absurdity of their charge, how Satan could not and would not cast out Satan, and that this miracle of healing the man possessed of the demon was a sign that God's Spirit rested upon him and that by the power of that Spirit he did his work, and his casting out demons was a sign that the Kingdom of God was in their midst. Then

it was that he added the solemn utterance on the Unpardonable Sin, telling them that the sin against the Holy Ghost could not be forgiven a man, "neither in this world nor in the world to come."

It is plain that the words of Jesus either condemn these men to whom he was speaking as guilty of that unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, or at least warn them that they are well on the road to the commission of such a sin. Our best knowledge, then, of the sin against the Holy Ghost is a study of the characters of these men whom Jesus thus condemns and warns. In their characters as lighted up by the incidents here related by St. Matthew we see a deep malignancy of evil, an inveteracy of opposition to the truth, a capacity to hate a good man who had done a good work, and, instead of seeing in that good work a sign of the Kingdom of God, discerning therein only an evidence of collusion with the devil. It is such men, Christ says, who are committing the sin against the Holy Ghost. For them there is no hope and no forgiveness, because they will not come unto him that they might have life. They cannot be forgiven because they will not repent and seek forgiveness. Their light has become darkness and that darkness is great. From all this we learn:

I. That the Sin Against the Holy Ghost Is Not the Sin About Which a Man Is Troubled and Distressed

No man who is anxious about his soul, who, like the woman of our introduction, fears that he cannot be forgiven, has committed the sin unto death. The men who have committed that sin are the ones who think the least about it. They are like the case-hardened Pharisees who railed on Jesus, but whose own conscience never troubled them. A man may well be, indeed, all of us who are not yet resting in Christ ought to be, anxious about the possibility of committing that dreadful transgression for which there is no mercy and no blood of propitiation. But the very stirring of anxiety shows that a man, although he may be in a bad way, is still recoverable. Dr. Beecher refers to the predecessor of his celebrated father, Lyman Beecher, in the pulpit at Litchfield. That good and able man became possessed with the melancholy conviction that he had sinned away his day of grace and had committed the Unpardonable Sin. He believed that he would go to hell; yet even in that belief he gave evidence that he would not go to that place of torment, and that his soul was still recoverable, by announcing it to be his determination to open a prayer meeting in hell, if that was to be his final destination. That very pur-

pose showed that he had not committed the Unpardonable Sin. The faintest stirring of a wish to be better, the slightest resistance to temptation, a dread of condemnation, can never exist in the heart of that man who has sinned away his day of grace.

II. That It Is No Single Act of Transgression

Such an act may complete a long story of rebellion and transgression, and from henceforth the Spirit of God no longer strives with the man. But it was not that one act, but the state of the man's heart, his long journey in evil that has brought him to that fearful condition.

The majority of those who have felt that they have committed the Unpardonable Sin "rummage the depositories of their memory to hit upon some one deed of enormity to which forgiveness will not be extended." The woman with whom I commenced my sermon was thinking of some one particular sin of her life, and to her it seemed so heinous that she could not hope for forgiveness. But we make a mistake when we think of the sin against the Holy Ghost as some abhorrently wicked act, some deed of enormity, so wicked that it is inexpiable and unpardonable. On the contrary, these very deeds of crimson enormity often carry with them a reactive influence which awakens repentance in the heart of the sinner.

Moreover, the whole Christian system, as a system of redemptive religion, would fall to the ground, were we compelled to admit that there was a single sin, no matter how dark, malignant, heinous, crimson in its inveteracy, unfathomable in its turpitude, which was beyond the saving and purifying power of Christ. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from *all* sin, not the ordinary sins merely, but all, deep as hell and malignant as Satan. You cannot admit that a single sin is inexpiable without also admitting that Christ is a limited Savior, that his blood cleanses from some sins, but not all.

Nor is the sin against the Holy Ghost a sin of hot impulse, of passion. Men have committed such sins under the temptation of the moment and then have awakened to a fearful remorse and self-loathing. Conscience sheds a lurid light upon that one act of wickedness, and beholding his sin in that dreadful light, the man becomes convinced that when he did that act and yielded to that temptation he sealed the eternal doom of his soul. But it is not so. Such a sin, if unrepented of, if repeated, if persisted in, if left unforgiven, may at length bring a man to that state where no sermon can reach him and no prayers can move the arm of Mercy in his behalf, but it itself is not the Unpardonable Sin.

The Fifty-First Psalm breathes the penitential prayer of David. David cried to God—"Cast me

not away from thy presence and take not thy Holy Spirit from me." His dread was that his base crimes, adultery and murder, had cut the cord that bound him to God, and that God would cast him forever away. The circumstances of the sin of David, particularly his sin in the murder of Uriah, were such that make it among the most heinous transgressions recorded of man in the Bible or out of it. If one sin is the Unpardonable Sin, then David's sin was second to none. But his prayer is the prayer of a penitent sinner, not a sinner who has been cast away from the presence of God.

III. That It Is a State of Heart Rather Than a Definite Act

That state consists in disobedience to the light, the corruption of the moral sense, the perverse opposition to all the pleadings of God and all the promptings of conscience. It is not so much the evil fruit of a man's life, but the corruption of his heart, so that the man neither desires nor seeks after pardon. The last thing that he thinks of is forgiveness.

There are different ways by which a man can sink to that condition of helplessness. Long-continued indulgence in the sins of the flesh, with all warning disregarded and all invitation to awake unto righteousness scorned, may bring a man to a condition

in which his whole moral nature is eaten away. The Spirit calls and there is no response. The light of truth and revelation shines upon him, but he knows it not. He is as dead to that influence as the corpse on the battle field is dead to the song of the birds and blind to the shining of the morning sun.

Robert Burns well describes the deadly effects of the sin of sensuality in his *Epistle to a Young Friend:*

> "I waive the quantum o' the sin
> The hazard of concealing;
> But, och; it hardens a' within,
> And petrifies the feeling!"

Another path to the Lost Country of the Unpardonable Sin is that of tampering with conscience. The man hears the warning, but he begins to argue and equivocate and to make allowances, and to persuade himself that his transgression is not so bad. By and by, as was the case with Balaam, the angel of the Lord who was sent to warn the man and stand between him and his sin steps aside and commands him to go on in his evil way until he has come to the place where there is no repentance. It is never safe to go against your conscience, even in the smallest matter of daily life. Robert Southey has a poem on the Inchcape Bell. This was a bell buoy off a dangerous shore of Scotland. In a drunken spree a wild sea captain, to injure the folk

in the harbor, cut the bell from its mooring and it sank into the depths of the sea. Months afterward that same captain's ship was driven before the storm. They hearkened in vain for the sound of the bell buoy which would guide them to port. Missing the channel, the ship drove on the rocks and all perished. It is a parable of a piercing truth. He who muffles conscience may live to see the day when conscience will not speak. In the words of the prophet, "Ye have set at naught all my counsel and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh."

The honest doubter will receive as tender and patient treatment at the hands of Jesus as did Doubting Thomas. But there is a different kind of doubt; there is a doubt that is one with that of these Scribes and Pharisees. The officers whom they dispatched to arrest Jesus came back without him because they were convinced that "never man spake as this man." The common people when they saw him heal the blind, dumb, and possessed of the devil said, "Is this the Son of David?" The centurion who stood by the Cross and saw him die, exclaimed, "Surely this was the Son of God!" But all these evidences were lost on the mind and heart of the foes of Jesus, and even after his death they financed a lie to prevent the spread of the Gospel. That kind of doubt is fearful, carrying a man, unless he quickly turn, down

to final reprobation. It is the doubt, the skepticism, that sneers at goodness. It is devilish, satanic, and from it there is no repentance, and for it no blood of expiation and propitiation. It is a blasphemy against the Spirit of Holiness, a sin unpardonable.

Conclusion

I can imagine a man listening to me thus far and breathing within his breast a sigh of relief. His mind flashed back to some dark and secret transgression of yesterday, and conscience made him to possess the sins of his youth. When he heard the Unpardonable Sin mentioned he thought of that dark sin of lust or dishonesty or treachery or revenge or cruelty, and wondered if that sin could ever be forgiven. But he breathes easily because he has heard the preacher say that the Unpardonable Sin is not one about which a man takes thought or is troubled inwardly, nor is it a sin of a moment, of hot passion, nor a sin that he has committed without a thousand warnings. But I would have no man who is not resting on Christ for his eternal salvation feel that he need give himself no concern. The very fact that the Unpardonable Sin is a state, a consummation of character, ought to warn you and awaken you into repentance. Every repeated deed of wilful sin, every stifled warning of conscience and every muffling of its incessant bell, every deferred doing

of good, every resistance to the Holy Spirit, every putting off till tomorrow what you ought to do today, every waiting for a more convenient season to arrange your peace with God, every conscious and wilful delay in this great matter of repentance brings you so much nearer to that state of heart which the Savior of all mercy and compassion, and who shed his blood for all, declared to be hopeless. There never was a path on the mountain side, on the hillside, on the plain, or in the woods that did not lead somewhere; and this path of continual delay, of waiting and waiting and waiting, before you close with God's great offer of peace and forgiveness through Jesus Christ, has, if followed, but one ending—darkness, condemnation, death forever. But you do not wish nor intend to go that far? Then, while it is called today, forsake the path that leads in that direction and set your feet in the path of repentance and forgiveness.

The Scriptures describe three different and consecutive relationships between a man and the Holy Spirit. First, Grieving the Holy Spirit. We grieve him when we stain our souls with any act or shadow of sin. Second, Resisting him. We resist the Holy Spirit when we refuse to hear his voice as he invites us to put our trust in Christ and warns us from delay, impenitence, and unbelief. Third, *Quenching him.* We have quenched the Holy Spirit when we

have resisted him so persistently and obstinately that he withdraws himself from us. Then our condition is hopeless. Our friends may pray earnestly to God for our salvation; the sorrows and the joys of this world may visit us in impartial succession; the church bells may sound in our ears; the hymns of grace and redemption may echo all about us; the preacher may reason with us of righteousness and temperance and judgment to come; death itself may knock and bid us prepare to depart; but in vain are all these ministries because the Holy Spirit no longer speaks in them and through them. Without him we cannot repent, we cannot believe, we cannot be saved. If, then, ye hear his voice, obey! Do not grieve him! Do not resist him! *Do not quench* him.

"Seek the Lord and his strength."
1 Chronicles 16: 11.

XVI. *"Do you ever pray about it?"*

IT was an unusual thing when this man, well advanced in years, of high professional standing as a lawyer and high social standing, publicly confessed his faith in Christ and united with the Church. One of the reasons he gave for taking this step was for the sake of his influence upon others. Among those of whom he was thinking was a young man associated with him in his law practice. He had made a brilliant record in the law school, and had marked ability; he was married, and had two charming children. But he was the victim of an evil habit, indulgence in strong drink. Speaking of this young man and his prospects and his temptation, his uncle told me one day how, when he had been counseling him and expostulating with him, he said to him, "Do you ever pray about it?"

Do you ever pray about it? The question which that fine Christian gentleman addressed to his nephew when speaking with him about his besetting

sin has always remained in my mind. It suggests to me the way in which prayer helps us in our temptations and in our battle with sin. This will be a practical subject for everyone, for we are all tempted in one way or another. There are the temptations of the body and its appetites; and perhaps the worse temptations of dishonesty and covetousness and envy and jealousy, greed and cowardice; and most fatal of all, the temptations of doubt and unbelief. In all these temptations there is involved great danger and moral waste. In this struggle with temptation our great ally and friend is prayer. I wish to repeat the man's question to his tempted friend and relative—"Do you ever pray about it?" and asking that question, I will try to show how prayer is a very present help in the time of trouble.

I do not care to spend much time upon what is called the "problem" of prayer. We all recognize what that problem is, as it has often been discussed; first of all, that if God is infinitely good, and infinitely wise, then he knows our necessities and our dangers, and being altogether good, he will do for us that which is best without waiting for our prayers. That seems at first a reasonable proposition. Yet we must remember that our petitions and our prayers are probably a part of the divine plan itself. Christ, who knew more about God than any other, urged

men to pray earnestly, believingly, and without ceasing. In his two great parables on prayer, that of the Unjust Judge who was importuned by the widow to avenge her, and the Friend at Midnight, who knocked upon his neighbor's door until he arose and gave unto him, Christ taught us to pray, and not to faint.

In connection with prayer, too, there arises the problem of law. It is said that if God answered prayer, especially in the natural world, unless what we pray for is in direct line with what is ordered there, God would be breaking his own laws. So the great physicist, Tyndall, said: "Without the disturbance of a natural law as serious as the stoppage of an eclipse, or the rolling of the river Niagara up the Falls, no act of humiliation could call down showers from Heaven or deflect upward a single beam of the sun." We rejoice in the uniformity of nature; but we are not to be frightened out of prayer because of what we know about the laws of nature. Man has dominion over nature, and all laws in this world have been framed for his good; and I suppose, if God cared to, he could suspend them for the sake of man's benefit. So George MacDonald put it:

"But in the dumbness of the rolling time,
No veil of silence shall encompass me—
Thou wilt not once forget and let me be;
Rather thou wouldst some old chaotic prime

Invade, and, moved by tenderness sublime,
Unfold a world that I, Thy child, might see."

Speaking of prayer and its problems, Bismarck once said: "When I was fourteen, I remember thinking that prayer was useless or irrelevant, for it struck me that God knew better than I (and I still think so, except that now I hold the value of prayer is that it implies submission to a stronger power than my own). And I am convinced of the existence of that Power, which is neither arbitrary nor capricious."

Whenever you are troubled by these so-called problems of prayer, and tempted to give up praying because of those difficulties, the thing to remember is that God has implanted in our hearts the instinct of prayer. Perhaps there are some who, as the father of a very sick girl recently confessed to me, pray only in the time of trouble. But even that prayer, uttered only in the time of trouble, is an infallible witness to this God-given instinct of prayer. If there are certain problems connected with the answering of prayer and the hearing of prayer, over against those problems we place the problem of the instinct of prayer. How can you account for it?

We may not be able to explain how God hears or answers prayer; but thousands have found that prayer in the time of temptation or trouble is a

mighty help. What a power prayer is! It is the divine telegraphy which unites us with heaven. When the Atlantic cable was laid amid such great rejoicing, one who was thinking of a greater means of communication, not between continent and continent, and man and man, but between the visible and invisible world, between the soul of man and his Creator, said: "The two hemispheres are now successfully united by means of the electric wire. But what is this, after all, compared with the instantaneous communication between the throne of divine Grace and the heart of man? Offer up your silent petition. It is transmitted through realms of unmeasured space more rapidly than the lightning's flash; and the answer reaches the soul ere the prayer has died away on the sinner's lips. Yet this telegraph fulfilling its saving functions, ever since Christ died for men on Calvary, fills not the world with exultation and shouts of gladness, with illumination and bonfires and the booming of cannon. The reason is, one is the telegraph of this world, and may produce revolutions on earth, as it has; the other is the sweet communication between Christ and the Christian soul, and will secure a glorious immortality in heaven. And this greatest of wonders, within the reach and use of all, is without money and without price."

I. Prayer Helps Us by Showing the Difference Between Right and Wrong

I do not mean that prayer is a substitute for conscience, or that a man has to pray before he sees the difference between good and evil. But the earnest prayer of a soul confronted by temptation, by a choice, always strengthens and registers the warning and illumination of conscience. It scatters and dispels those mists which often hang low over the path of duty.

I was once consulted by a student who had been urged to take a course of conduct that was wrong, not only wrong, but shockingly so. Amazed that one should feel it necessary to consult a minister, or anyone else, as to the right or wrong of the sugguested action, I said, finally, "How does it seem to you when you pray about it?" "Oh, then," came the quick answer, "it seems to be wrong." That is the great thing about prayer. It strips the mask from the face of temptation. A temptation, to succeed, at least in the beginning, must wear some disguise or mask. But prayer tears away that disguise and reveals evil in all its hideous features. Look at the suggestion or the temptation in the light of prayer; bring it into contact with holy thought and desires. If wrong, it cannot stand that light, for prayer will no more direct the temptation-beset soul

in the wrong direction than the North Star will direct the tempest-tossed mariner in the wrong course on the sea.

II. Prayer Uttered Today Will Help Us in the Unknown Difficulty of Tomorrow

It is better to pray when trouble comes than not to pray at all; but still better to pray *before it comes.* We often fail, and fall because we pray too late. The old gladiators used to go out and practice in the empty arena before the throne of Caesar. There they stood in the arena, receiving, avoiding, or giving blows with an imaginary adversary, imaginary today, but real and incarnate and dangerous tomorrow. Some of our dangers and adversaries are present today only by anticipation and expectation. But now we can pray against them, as Christ prayed for Peter that his faith might not fail. Recently, I had tidings of two men in the ministry with whom I had had some association in the past. Concerning one of them, the less said the better; it would have been far better for him that he had died. The other did die, honored and respected, at the end of a long and faithful ministry for Jesus Christ. When I read the account of his death, I remembered what he had once said to me sitting in my study. It was this: "I have always prayed to God that I might never do any deed which would bring

reproach upon the name of Christ or his Church." He never did; and I have no doubt that his oft-repeated prayer was one of the reasons why he left behind him that unstained record.

III. Prayer Helps in the Battle of Temptation

However much we pray before, or however we have neglected that great preparation, the earnest, sincere prayer will give us strength to resist evil. There is a world of moral truth packed in those two familiar lines of the old hymn—

> "Satan trembles when he sees
> The weakest saint upon his knees."

Prayer is a breastplate of armor which the shaft of Satan cannot penetrate. It is when we lower the shield of prayer that the great adversary has his chance. "I fell," was the lament and the warning of one who had been overcome by sin, "I fell when I ceased praying."

Prayer helps us when we are confronted by evil because it sets forth in clear light the sacredness of life, the incomparable value of the soul, and the dark, dark tragedy of sin. A man of fine inheritance and training and ability who was struggling with a dark and terrible temptation once came to me and asked me to pray with him. After I had done so,

he said, "I never used to think much about prayer, but now I begin to see that there is something in it." Yes, there is something in it—more than something. There is a great deal in it. There is something in it which is not found in the wisdom and the devices of this world. It brings to you the strength of heaven.

IV. Prayer Helps After We Have Been Defeated

A war is not lost necessarily by a single battle, and the campaign is not ended in one day. If we prayed before the battle, and prayed during the battle, certainly, of all times, we ought to pray after we have been defeated. In this connection, let me read the following message received from a young man: "A young Christian who has sinned in secret desires the most earnest prayers of yourself and your congregation at every service this next Sunday. After many adversities and disappointed ambitions in doing the right thing, he became weakened and discouraged and the devil saw his chance to slip into his life. He now repents and is living close to his church, but feels the need of many prayers to help him carry on. Please pray for a renewal of faith which he once had, and also that the gracious heavenly Father will forgive him for his sin."

Beaten in one battle, this young man is wise

enough to start another battle, and confessing his sin, prays for help and new strength and courage and asks others to pray for him. Oh, I think the greatest power of prayer is exhibited, not when it forearms and forewarns us against the day of battle; not when it inspires our courage and nerves our arm in the day of struggle and conflict; but when it whispers its word of encouragement to the man who has been beaten, to the man who has fallen, and puts another sword in his hand, and lifts him to his feet and bids him go forth once more into the battle. That was the great thing about the prodigal's prayer. He said, "I will arise and go unto my father"; and he not only made the prayer, but he arose and went unto his father.

One of the conditions of success in prayer is sincerity and earnestness. If we regard iniquity in our hearts the Lord will not hear us. No man is really praying about a temptation or a besetting sin who at the same time is deliberately retaining it and harboring it in his breast. That is the sort of prayer which is always hindered. We must be honest with ourselves and honest with God. We must pray, too, in faith. I do not take those repeated utterances of Christ on this subject and that of his apostles as meaning merely faith that God is going to grant the particular thing which we ask. I think faith there has a much larger and a much grander mean-

ing and sweep. When we pray, we must have faith in God, in his existence, in his love of truth, in his hatred of evil, in his desire that men should be upright and honorable in their life, and that the worst of sinners should repent and be saved.

Then, there must be persistence and perseverance in prayer. For our example we might take Jacob, who came scarred out of the battle of prayer, halting upon his thigh, after the midnight encounter by the fords of the Jabbok with the angel of God. Or still better, we might take as our example the lonely Struggler of Gethsemane, who prayed earnestly and whose sweat became, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground. Who of us can make an affirmative answer to the indictment of the inspired writer? "Ye have not yet resisted against sin, striving unto blood." If the soul was worth the humiliation and the suffering of Christ to redeem it, it is worth our own most desperate struggles; and if Christ himself was heard "through strong crying and tears," then such crying and tears, and such resisting even unto blood, will not be out of place in our own life.

When Ananias protested against his dangerous commission to go and minister to Saul of Tarsus at Damascus, God said to him, "Behold, he prayeth!" That meant not only the sincerity of Saul, but the faithfulness of God to those who call upon him.

The moment God saw Saul on his knees, in humble and penitent prayer, his blasphemy, his cruel persecution, his bloody deeds and fanatical hatreds were all forgotten—"Behold, he prayeth!"

Oh, the depth, both of the riches and the power of God! Scarred, stained, and broken by sin, a man may be; rebellious, disobedient, disloyal to self and to others and to God; but if now God can say of him, "Behold, he prayeth," the future is bright. God's love is greater than man's sin. His ability to forgive is greater than our ability to wound his heart. However far we have gone from God, God is with us when we call upon him. "Behold, he prayeth!" That prayer starts a new chapter; that prayer creates a new battle field; that prayer puts a new sword in our hands; and that prayer, uttered earnestly and sincerely, may create a new heaven and a new earth where the cleansed, redeemed, and purified soul walks in the freedom and purity of the Sons of God.

Do you ever pray about it? God grant that his angel may take home and bear straight up to Christ's dwelling place and mercy seat the blessed tidings, "Behold, he prayeth."

"No man careth for my soul."
PSALM 142: 4.

XVII. *Alone*

ON a desolate island in the south Pacific you will see, should you ever land there, a monument with this inscription:

In Memory of
ALEXANDER SELKIRK
Mariner
A native of Largo, in the County of Fife, Scotland
Who lived on this Island in complete Solitude
For Four Years and Four Months
1704-1709

That monument on the island of Juan Fernandez is a singular tribute to the universal appeal of DeFoe's great tale of *Robinson Crusoe,* founded upon the experience of the Scottish sailor, Alexander Selkirk. I am convinced that the thing that made that story grip us as children was not the shipwreck and the subsequent adventures and ingenious contrivances of Crusoe, whereby he made a habitation for himself in a wilderness, but the loneliness of the man. Our young hearts went out to him as

in the narrative, and still more in the pictures; we saw him clad in furs and with a sunshade over his head, making his solitary expeditions about the island and returning again to his companionless hut.

But you do not need to go to desolate isles, washed by the Pacific's surges, to find lonely men. They are much nearer than that; and on the thronged highways of our city there are those whose story of solitude and loneliness, could we but hear it, would move us more than poor shipwrecked Robinson Crusoe's solitude did when we were children. This sermon is the echo of a cry from one of these islanded souls in the midst of the great city. The letter was signed, "One of the many strangers within the gates of your city." In the letter there is this paragraph: "I suddenly felt the coldness of a city's indifference and I resented it. I knew as I had never before realized that I was alone in a large city. And so I just wanted to be where I could see the faces of home folks, if only their pictured faces, they who would have known and understood; and my mother's face, a picture in which she is smiling." Undoubtedly there are thousands who could write the same lines.

There is a loneliness of the midnight hour, and the loneliness of the desert, and the uninhabited isle, and the heavy, depressing solitude of the mountains. But the worst loneliness of all is the loneliness of

the crowd—the solitude of the city. You pass up and down the busy highways and look into the windows of thousands of homes and pass thousands of men and women hurrying hither and yon on their respective errands. They are men like yourself, of the same passions, hopes, fears, capacities for joy and sorrow. Multitudes, multitudes of faces! Yet your heart grows sick within you when you reflect that beyond the ordinary ties of humanity you are nothing to these thousands of persons and they are nothing to you. If you have joy, you cannot share it with them; if you are bearing a heavy load of anxiety or care, they will not help you with it. You could lie down on the sidewalk and breathe your last, and not a heart among all those thousands of hearts would beat more rapidly, and not an eye would be suffused with tears. "No man careth for my soul!" is the appalling realization that suddenly grips your mind.

The Psalm from which I take the text to match the cry of loneliness that goes up all the time from our great city's streets and offices and lodging houses is supposed to have been composed by David when he was pursued by King Saul and was hiding in a cave. In the cave was solitude, and outside were enemies and strangers. "Look on my right hand and see, for there is no man that knoweth me. No man careth for my soul." How the Psalms fit hu-

man life! How this cry, breathed centuries ago by homesick, fugitive David as he hid in the cave, can be repeated without the change of a word by lonely people today!

One of the loveliest parts of our country is the mountain district in Maryland known as South Mountain. The deep mantle of forest on the shoulders of the mountains; the blue sky above; the music of the brooks hurrying to the Antietam and the Potomac; the fertile valleys in the distance, with the white ribbons of the limestone pikes and the checkered squares of orchard and field; and the church spires, telling where some hamlet dreams and sleeps in peace; and the spirals of smoke going up from the chimneys of the farmhouses—all combine to give the landscape a singular charm and attractiveness. At the summit of Crampton Gap, where a battle was fought two days before Antietam, is the picturesque mountain home of one of the most celebrated of the war correspondents; and not far from his home is a noble archway erected as a memorial to the correspondents of the Civil War. Some years ago this famous correspondent was seen by a friend hurrying for a train at the depot in New York. His friend halted him and asked him whither he was bound. His response was: "I'm going down to my home in the mountain in Maryland. It's too lonely here in New York." Yes, where men speak to one

another when they pass, where they know one another, where the intercourse is easy and friendly, there is the place where the heart likes to dwell. I thought his home on South Mountain on the day I visited it was about as lonely a spot as one could well choose for a home; but to him it was less lonely than New York's avenues, where men were in too great a hurry to stop and talk with one another.

There is, of course, a loneliness of soul, regardless how or where a man lives. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddleth not with its joy."

> "We are spirits clad in veils;
> Heart by heart was never seen;
> All our deep communing fails
> To remove the shadowy screen."

This being so, there is always an unrevealable and incommunicable part of us that dwells by itself. But I refer to the actual loneliness occasioned by life in the great city and the separation from old scenes and old faces.

I. The Perils of That Loneliness

"It is not good for man to be alone," was spoken at the beginning of man's history on the earth, and the truth of that saying has never been challenged. It is not good for the natural kindling of his whole nature and the fusing of his spirit. There are those

who, in stubborn pride of heart or foolish resentment, keep themselves aloof from their kind; but their life is unnatural and therefore unhappy. It is not that forced and artificial loneliness created by a man himself that I wish to deal with now, but the loneliness of being among strangers and with those who do not care for your soul. It is always a safeguard for a man to have about him at least one other person who, in the highest meaning of the word, cares for his soul, is interested in his welfare, and correspondingly dangerous for him to be without such safeguards.

In imagination let us follow the city career of a young man who comes to the city in the way so many thousands do, and live to rue the day that ever brought them here. The young lad gets tired of the farm, or of the monotonous life of the village, and he hears of some position which can be secured in the city. He gets together a little money and buys a ticket for the city. When he goes down the lane from the old farmhouse on the West Virginia hillside, and turns to look back at the members of his family standing in the doorway, his enthusiasm subsides for a moment and his purpose falters. He never imagined that his father and mother and brothers and sisters meant just quite so much to him. But he pulls himself together, and boarding the train with his cheap suitcase, starts on the jour-

ney, and the new sights and new faces soon cause him to forget the pang of parting. He arrives at the station and at once finds himself in a surging mass of mankind. He did not realize that so many people could exist in one city. He tries to look as if familiar with and accustomed to it all; but the truth is that he need not have put himself to any trouble to do so, for no one looks at him to see whether he is new to the city's ways or not. He goes to the Y.M.C.A. and gets a list of rooming houses, and then starts on a dreary round of investigation. The boarding homes he finds are mostly old mansions, long ago abandoned by their wealthy owners as the approach of business drove them to the suburbs. The houses all strike him as dark, and the great rooms as melancholy and depressing, and the cleanliness of his mother's house is nowhere in evidence. At length he finds one that suits his pocketbook, unpacks his suitcase, and settles down in his new home, the fourth story back, the last room on the left. He gets a job in the department store, where they are glad to get hold of a fresh-faced, broad-shouldered, healthy-looking lad.

His new work interests him, at least by its novelty, and he tries hard to give satisfaction. He is weary when, after supper at the cafeteria, he gets back to his room in the lodging house. It made him feel a little sad when several persons passed him in the

hallway without speaking to him. He sits on his one rocking-chair and wishes that he had somebody to talk with or somewhere to go. But there is no one, and there is nowhere to go. So several days pass. He keeps up his courage, but it is plain that he is lonely, and, although he would never confess it, homesick.

Then Sunday morning came. He was free to go where he pleased, provided he could find anyone with whom to go. He had always been in the habit of going to church on Sunday at home, and he finds his way to the nearest church of his denomination. The size of the building and the number of the people are in striking contrast with the little brick building at home, where the people come in talking with one another in a friendly way and where a single stranger would at once be remarked. He is shown to a seat and sits through the service. But he is not just in the mood to enjoy it; other sounds and other faces keep pressing in upon him; the minister's voice is new and strange; and when the service is ended, although the pew is filled with people, and he is at the foot of it, none of them turn to greet him or shake hands with him. He thinks that is strange, but he does not realize that perhaps all the people in the pew were as much strangers to the church and to one another as he is.

Another week passes by, and when the next Sun-

day comes he lies in bed until twelve o'clock, and spends the rest of the day in the park. The joylessness of his life oppresses him, and yet he is unable to get into easy and natural relationship with other people. About the only person who has shown any interest in him or a wish to cultivate his friendship is a young man about his own age and who works near him in the store. Yet the first time he saw this man he immediately distrusted him and disliked him. In his conversation in the restaurant at the lunch hour there was an undertone of something which was not right, a certain easy familiarity in his references to women, a trace of boasting of his knowledge of the city's underlife; and once or twice on the street, as they went back to the store, he was greeted in an intimate way by persons whose character was evidently not above reproach. On several occasions this young man had pressed him to "go out" with him, but he had steadfastly refused. But on a wet, bleak November night, as he sat in his room reading the newspaper by the dim light of the gas jet, feeling utterly dejected, and saying to himself, "Any kind of company is better than this!" there came a knock at his door. It was his acquaintance of the store. Again his invitation was given, and this time, after a moment's hesitation, it was accepted. "In that night was Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, slain!" In that night the pearl of a pre-

cious soul was cast before swine, who trod it underneath their miry feet.

Down yonder on the West Virginia hills, the dogwood tree in front of the farmhouse is white with its blossoms, and the Judas tree down by the lane is clad in glorious crimson. But mother, as you go about your daily toil, and treasuring the packet of letters from the city, with the additions to it getting less and less frequent, and looking to the day when your son will come back a proud and successful man, I would not shatter your dream. But, mother, your boy will never come home. These hills will never see him again. He has taken his journey into a far country. And barefooted brother, and blue-eyed sister, with your hair down your back, boasting among your school fellows about your big brother in the big city, and the big store where he works, keep on thinking that he is going up, rising in the world, for I dread the hour when you must learn how far down he has gone, how far he has fallen! Your poor brother was lonely, and to get away from loneliness he took a long, long journey, so far away that the mail even can never reach him; and now, for the first time in his life, he knows what real loneliness is—the loneliness of sin.

I have spoken of but a single instance of how souls through loneliness are led into sin. But how many thousands there are!

II. Safeguards Against the Perils of Loneliness

Against the perils of loneliness there are a number of tried and tested safeguards. One of these is to have a deep and real sympathy for other people who are lonely. It may be difficult, but try to do less looking in and more looking out. In kindly interest in other lives, in acts of considerateness and helpfulness to other pilgrims in the city, the loneliness of your lot will be alleviated and its severity mitigated. In Longfellow's celebrated poem, the lonely, desolate man went out on the bridge at midnight, determined to leap from the parapet and end it all. But as he stood on the bridge and heard the clocks strike the hour, he thought of how many thousands of care-encumbered men, each bearing his burden of sorrow, had crossed the bridge since then. His own burden seemed less heavy and more tolerable as he saw the long procession of burdened lives pass by.

"But now it has fallen from me,
It lies buried in the sea;
And only the sorrow of others
Throws its shadow over me.

And forever and forever,
As long as the river flows,
As long as the heart has passions,
As long as life has woes;

The moon and its broken reflection,
And its shadows shall appear,
As the symbol of love in heaven,
And its wavering image here."

Another safeguard is the home touch. A British admiral has said that he never knew a midshipman to go wrong who wrote every week to his family at home. You see it posted up in the Y.M.C.A. halls, the reminder to sit down and write the letter home. You see that sign everywhere because men know its value. The writer of the letter out of which comes the sermon says: "I just wanted to be where I could see the faces of home folks, if only their pictured faces, they who would have known and understood, and my mother's face, a picture in which she is smiling." That will help, and sometimes it will save. Yes, dear face of mother, smile and shine through the murky clouds of temptation that are gathering about the head of thy son or thy daughter! Like the sun at morning after the blackness of the long night, let thy face shine kindly through the dark loneliness which envelopes thy child! And as, after the rain, the reappearance of the sun stretches the iridescent rainbow across the sky, so let thy faithful, loving smile, mother, shine through the tears and sorrows of thy children, that they shall be able to trace the rainbow of hope and forgiveness!

But the greatest safeguard is God. And that takes in prayer, the Bible, the Sabbath Day, and the worship of the church. The thought of God will help you in any hour of temptation through loneliness. The writer of the letter, this nameless stranger, wrote not to accuse the Church of coldness or unfriendliness, but to bear witness that although she came to the Church, feeling that in the great city no one cared for her soul, and with a desperate longing to see again a familiar face, she left the church feeling that she had been in her Father's house, and that it was his wish that she again pledge her faith and belief in his Son as her Savior. God grant that her experience shall be repeated by many others. God grant that whenever the church opens its doors for the holy convocation, there shall be not a few who shall go away cheered, encouraged, and inspired, more able to face life, with its unknown and its well known, because here, through God's Holy Spirit, they have been led into the presence of Jesus.

"The sorrows of hell compassed me about." PSALM 18: 5.

XVIII. *"I believe I am going to hell"*

I BELIEVE I am going to hell." The sentence shocks you. It has a dread echo to it. But, if such is the effect upon you, hearing it repeated by me, how much more solemn and impressive it must have been had you heard it as I heard it when it fell, not from the lips of one who repeated it and reported it, but from the lips of the very person whose soul was upheaved.

It takes an internal explosion and upheaval to know what people are really feeling, thinking, or believing. Explosions beneath the surface of a lake or river bring to the surface dead bodies and hidden objects. So in the breast of man great convulsions of grief, pain, fear, and remorse hurl hidden things to the surface, and the beholder stands aghast at what he has seen or heard. Then the question of sincerity sinks out of sight, and the truth, whether it be glorious or terrible, reveals itself.

It was such an explosion that I saw and heard

when the troubled soul before me hurled up from its depths that sentence of fear and woe, "I believe I am going to hell." As to the circumstances and details of this case and the causes contributory, I cannot speak. Over that we draw the impenetrable veil of obscurity and anonymity and charity. The exclamation appalled me when first I heard it, sitting in my study, and it has reverberated many a time in the chambers of memory. I will try, if possible, to convey to you some of the impressions that this exclamation produced in my own mind.

I. That Life Confirms What the Bible and Christian Truth Teaches as to Hell

To one who informed him that he had got rid of hell, Voltaire replied: "I congratulate you, for I have not been able to do that myself." One has said that if there were no hell we should have to invent one. However that may be, if there were no word that carried with it the implication of our word "hell," we should be compelled to coin some word which would fit the facts of the heart, for without such a word as "hell," one of the deepest, strongest sentiments and convictions of the heart would have no equivalent in expression. Words are only the pictures, or symbols, of reality.

Hell is sometimes said to be the nightmare created

by medieval theologians. It is an idea invented by superstition and ignorance, a slander against man, and a libel upon God. But is this true? Here on the shelves of my library were the books of theology dealing with the subject of future retribution, and there on the table was the chief work on that subject, *The New Testament.* But here before me, with the books looking down upon us, sat the troubled soul out of whose agitated depths had come the confession about hell. The declarations in the books were feeble echoes of the voices of long ago; but here was the voice of the living—vibrant, piercing, unmistakable, probing the cavities of the mind and thrilling the drowsy chambers of the soul. Ah! were it only the books, the systematic theologies, the musty calf-bound volumes, the inherited forms of belief, we could and would very quickly get rid of this idea about sin producing hell here and hereafter. But just when we are about to consign these infamous and melancholy books to the dust heap or the flame, lo, life upheaves itself, unbares itself, reveals itself, utters sweeping confirmation and approval of what the books have said and taught, and in silent awe we take up the books one by one and put them back on the shelves. Life confirms the theology of the Bible.

II. That the Soul Has Within It All the Necessary Instruments for Its Own Punishment and the Material Out of Which It Can Create Hell

As to the case before me, it was impossible to tell just how much of the misery I saw rocking and heaving and rolling before me had been self-inflicted, and how much was due to the transgression of another. It was plain, however, that part of this misery was self-inflicted, and that the flames of conscience and remorse were burning fiercely beneath the breast. Reading an English book sometime ago, I came upon this sentence: "If you have ever seen it, you will never forget it—the agony of hopeless remorse, when the sense of sin, of evil done, or evil, the consequences of which have slipped out of control, haunts and scourges the soul into an agony of despairing pain." Several times, and each time never to be forgotten, I have seen this agony of hopeless remorse. This was one of those times.

Remorse is the prelude upon earth to hell. The laws of God were not made to be broken, and when they are broken we carry about with us our own prison, executioner, and instruments of torture. "The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven." The fact of man's greatness and immortality is taught in many

ways, but never more solemnly or impressively than by the misery of the human heart in remorse because of sin. In his *Lay Sermons,* Huxley says that "Our happiness depends upon our knowing something of the rules of the game which has been played for untold ages, where every man and woman is one of the two players, the chess board the world, the rules of the game the laws of nature, and the player on the other side hidden from us, whose play is always fair, just, and patient, but who never overlooks a mistake, or makes the smallest allowance for ignorance. The one who plays ill is checkmated, but without remorse." Huxley was speaking of natural laws; but one of the imprescriptible laws of God's moral world is that transgression is linked with suffering, and that in his own conscience man possesses the instrument of his own misery. Who can describe the pangs which conscience inflicts upon a guilty soul, awakening for the first time to the fact that it has been expelled from Paradise, and that it has been the careful and deliberate architect of its own wretchedness. The soul has chosen its mate and now shrinks in dismay from its own choice.

"I sat alone with my conscience,
In a place where time has ceased;
And we talked of my former living,
In the land where the years increased.

And I felt that I should have to answer
The question put to me,
And to face the answers and questions
Through all eternity.

The ghosts of forgotten actions,
Come floating before my sight,
And things that I thought were dead things
Were alive with terrible might,
And the vision of all my past life
Was an awful thing to face
Alone with my conscience, sitting
In that solemn silent place."

III. That the Pains of Conscience in This Life Are Prophetic of the Fact and Method of Future Retribution

It is a strange thing that men, seeing and acknowledging as they do the misery into which men fall in this world, should conclude therefrom that it is safe and wise to dismiss any thought of a future reckoning. If we were sure that we were not to live again, we might do that; but who can be sure of this, or know that when he escapes from evil here, he does not flee to others, which he knows not of? The judgments of God fall frequently enough in this world to let us know that God punishes sin; but seldom enough to let us know that his punishments are not limited to this world. Sooner can you pull down the stars than take from man the sense of his accountability to the laws of God. If in the

next life we continue to be rational creatures, with memory, reason, and conscience, then there is no difficulty about the fact and the method of future retribution. In the *Confessions of an Opium Eater,* DeQuincey tells of a relative who fell into a river, and "being on the very verge of death, saw in a moment her whole life clothed in its forgotten incidents arrayed before her as in a mirror, not successively, but simultaneously, and she had a faculty developed as suddenly for comprehending the whole and every part. This I can believe. The dread book of account, which the Scriptures speak of, is in fact the mind itself of each individual." The open book of which John speaks in Revelation will be to every man the solemn apocalypse of his own entire past life. In that apocalypse, in that sudden, but full and faithful vision of all that we have thought, said, imagined, done, and of what attitude we have taken toward the Redeemer whom God sent to save us, in that there will be sufficient material for judgment. When the rich man in hell was inclined to protest against his fate, Abraham said to him, "Son, remember." For some men memory will be hell.

"What is this power
That recollects the distant past,
And makes this hour,
Unlike the last,
Pregnant with life,

Calling across the deep
To things that slumber, men that sleep?
They rise by number
And with stealthy tread,
Like a battalion's tread,
Marshal our dead.

This is the gift
Men cannot bargain with nor shift;
Which went with Dives
Down to Hell,
With Lazarus up to Heaven;
Which will not let us ere forget
The sins of years,
Though washed with tears.
Whate'er it be,
Men call it Memory."

IV. That Spiritual Despair Is One of the Dangers and Results of Transgression

This soul with whom we commenced was not only conscious of present wrong and suffering, but felt itself to be on the way to a state of heart and mind that nothing but the word "hell" could describe, a state in which the soul would cease to struggle for the good, would no longer try to repent, but would give itself over to the powers of evil, and say to evil, "Evil, be thou good." This, I take it, was what this soul meant when it exclaimed, "I believe I am going to hell." Alas! of what pains our human hearts are capable. But here is a pain which outstabs all other pain, outplunges all other deeps, out-

glooms all other darkness, outgulfs all other sorrows —the pain and distress of the soul which of its own volition throws itself into the arms of evil and says "goodbye" to God.

I suppose it is hardly necessary to repeat what I said to this troubled soul, except to say that they were not words of human counsel, and that the remedy proposed was not of human manufacture. Facing a situation like this, one realizes the necessity of the Divine Voice and the need of the Divine Remedy. Who would dare to heal lightly such a wound as this? Here we feel the necessity of Calvary and the bleeding victory of the Cross.

Christ came to save men from spiritual despair. In doing this he himself drank the cup of spiritual despair. The darkest moment for Christ was not when he knelt in moonlit Gethsemane, and sweating drops of blood, prayed, "Oh, my Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me"; nor was it when Judas, whom he had called out of the world and sheltered with his love, betrayed him with the traitor's kiss; nor was it when bound before his judges he heard Peter swear that he never knew him; nor was it when he heard the jeers and taunts and execrations of the mob which flowed about his cross. The darkest moment for Christ was when on the cross he drank the sinner's cup of separation from God and cried, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" That

cry Christ uttered so that you and I would never have to utter it. To whatever deeps a man has gone, Christ has gone deeper. He tasted death that we might have life. He tasted despair that we might have hope. He descended into hell that he might bring us up to heaven.

The Psalmist after his deliverance told how the pains of hell got hold upon him, but how he called upon the name of the Lord, saying, "O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul." This is the prayer for every troubled and storm-tossed soul, even though the distress be as deep and dark as that with which I have been dealing. Call upon the Lord, and he will hear you. Do not say, "I am going to hell," "I am turning my back on faith and virtue"; but, "I am going to Christ. I am on my way to heaven." Then you can sing with the Psalmist, "Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee."

"I have great sorrow and unceasing pain in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren's sake."

ROMANS 9: 2, 3.

XIX. *"I thank God even amid my tears"*

SHE was a member of the Sunday night congregations, and like so many, one to whom I had the privilege of preaching, but whom I never knew. I did not even know that she had ever come to the church until her husband appeared at the study and asked me to conduct her funeral service. He was a fine, stalwart man and she a charming woman. Sickness came and with it the long, hard struggle for life, and then the peace and quiet of death. As I stood by the coffin to read the service and thought that this was one of those who had sat in the congregation on the Sunday evenings, I realized anew the solemn responsibility of preaching and how true it is that we speak as dying men to dying men.

It was some days after the funeral that I received

a letter from the mother of the young woman thanking me for the office that I had rendered. In the letter she told me something of the history of her daughter's life and last illness. She had been a devout worshiper of Jesus Christ. Her husband, however, was a member of one of those popular sects which have the name of Christian but deny Jesus Christ and him crucified. It was but natural that under the spell of a yet undimmed infatuation and in close association with her husband's family, who all walked as he walked, she should have been influenced to a certain extent in the direction of this false religion. But because of her early grounding in the faith and her familiarity with the Bible, that refuge and strength against all false Christs and false Christianities, they had not yet been able to seduce her from her belief in Christ crucified. But strong forces were at work upon her, and strong tendencies were running in that direction, and her godly mother was afraid that her beloved daughter would fall away from the faith. To her, unlike so many mothers, this was not to be considered a thing of no consequence. On the contrary, she dreaded it and prayed earnestly against such issue.

Then came the sickness and the swift alternations of hope and despair until death settled the question, as it settles so many other questions, forever. When the mother recovered from the first paroxysm of her

grief, this was her consolation: she had lost her daughter, so far as this world is concerned, but she had the satisfaction of knowing that her daughter had died a believing Christian. That, after all, was the great thing. Her heart was broken with sorrow for her child's, her only daughter's, death; but in her sorrow she gave thanks to God that death took her before unbelief or apostasy won her from Jesus Christ. "I thank God even amid my tears!" Her daughter was dead to this world with its trials and bitternesses and crosses, but alive, alive forevermore, to Christ. "I thank God amid my tears. I had rather have my daughter in her grave, united by faith to Christ, than alive in this world and away from Christ."

An unusual mother, you say. Yes, a most extraordinary mother, a mother who took Christianity with its great warnings and great assurances seriously. Other mothers or fathers have said, referring to a child upon whom there had come some disgrace, "I had rather have seen him in his grave." But this mother said, "I thank God amid my tears. I would rather have her in her grave than have her alive and dead to Jesus Christ."

The mother's concern for the spiritual welfare of her daughter, and her fear lest she should drift away from Christ, and the consolation which she took in her physical death as possibly saving her from spir-

itual death, brings to our contemplation in a very striking way a number of important facts:

I. That There Is Such a Thing as a Clear, Definite Knowledge of Christ and Faith in Him

There is a Christ presented to us in the Scriptures who cannot be identified with or confused with any other Christ. The mother of this young woman knew that Christ and believed in him, and so did her daughter. They knew Christ as he was offered to them in the Scriptures, not as he was offered to them through the fancies and imaginations and unbelief of men. They knew, too, that this Christ was not to be confused with any other Christ.

It is not difficult to discover the features of the Christ offered to us in the Gospel. A clear, straightforward statement of this may be of some use to all of us and of *saving* power to some. In the midst of the babel of voices speaking in the religious subjects, it cannot be said too often or too earnestly just what Christ is and what he proposes to do, as we have him in the Gospel. He is there the Eternal Son of God, who became man and took to himself a true body and reasonable soul. He did not seem to be man or make that sort of impression upon the minds of men, but he was a true man. He was born of woman; he had brothers and sisters; he passed

through the helplessness of childhood and the enthusiasm of youth and came to young manhood. He knew what it was to be tempted. He was lonely. He was hungry and thirsty and in pain. His body was nailed to a tree and buried in a grave.

But this man was also God, the Son of God. He existed before the foundation of the world. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He taught the people with an authority which only God could claim. When he died, he was raised and declared to be the Son of God with power. He claimed equality with God, and there was a tone in his speech and a manner in his action and look in his face and a love in his heart which can be explained on no other ground. Who shall declare his generation?

This Son of God took the body of a man and became incarnate in order to reconcile the world which had sinned and rebelled to God. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. The ground of that reconciliation was not the beautiful words that Christ spake or the miracles which he performed, but the atoning death which he died. He once through the Eternal Spirit offered himself a sacrifice for sin. He was wounded for our iniquities. He bore our sins. He died the just for the unjust. Therefore through his death men are forgiven and can come to God. Through the power of

his death all things at last, whether in heaven or on earth, shall be reconciled to God. There shall not be a spirit in heaven nor a man on earth not reconciled to God, at peace with God, in full obedience to him and enjoying him forever.

The great proof of all this was the resurrection of Christ from the dead, for death is the wages of sin. He did not *seem* to rise: he did not rise with some sort of a spiritual body. The grave which had been hewn out of the rock, and in which never man had slept, where Nicodemus had buried him, and where the women had gone to weep, that very grave was empty on the third day and the graveclothes were lying there. But the body was not there. He had arisen. Thus God proved Christ to be the world's Savior, having raised him up with power.

After appearing to his disciples and telling them that he would send to them the Holy Ghost, and commanding them to go into all the world and preach the Gospel, he disappeared out of their sight, saying that in like manner as they had seen him go, men would see him come, in the clouds, with glory, and the angels with him. This incarnate and crucified and risen and ascended Lord Jesus will come to the earth a second time, to judge the quick and the dead. Then cometh the end. The spell of sin upon mankind will be broken forever. The world will be washed from its stain, and peace and love

shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. Christ shall be all and in all.

This is the inevitable and unavoidable Christ of the Scriptures. When I say "faith in Christ," that is the Christ to whom I refer. This Christ is rejected in two ways. First, by those who will have nothing whatever to do with Christ, who disregard or totally neglect his claims. The number of those who do this, as Christ himself prophesied, is very large. Second, he is rejected by a great number who take the Bible and use scriptural language and sing church hymns and repeat some of the precepts of Christ and, I have no doubt, live in a beautiful way some of those precepts, but avoid and deny the Christ that I have just described, by odd and fantastic interpretations of what he was and said, substituting for this clear and majestic Christ of Christian tradition, of inspired revelation, a Christ that you cannot describe, that you cannot define, except to say that he is not the Christ of the Bible and of the historic Church. With one party he is a good man, but not a God; with another he was the Son of God, but his death was not a sacrificial death for sin; with another he was the incarnation of the good and the lovely and the true, or the first man who had the "divine thought" and lived the divine life. Always something left out and something that is vital. There is nothing superfluous about Jesus Christ as

God has offered him to us. Whether you start with his incarnation or with his Second Advent, there is not a fact about Christ that is dispensable. A fragment like the Venus de Milo may be beautiful even in its marred and broken condition, telling us of the "beauty that was Greece," but a marred, broken, incomplete Christ is a useless, powerless, lifeless Christ.

Under the plea of a false liberalism, men have said and are saying that any Christ will do; any interpretation or explanation of Christ and Christianity will do, so long as the man is sincere about it or faithful to his own interpretation. But to say that is to insult Christ and make God out to be a liar. He has given us his Son and with mighty signs and wonders made clear to us, beyond all peradventure of a doubt, just who he is and how he saves us. He would not have done that had it made no difference whether men believed that he was God's Son or not. He would not have done that had he thought it made no difference whether men believed that he rose from the dead or not. He would not have offered him as the Only Redeemer from sin if men could have got along without a Savior, if God could have forgiven sin without the death of Christ. It is not any kind of a Christ peddled in the streets or in the churches that will save you, but God's Christ. "This is my beloved Son; hear ye him!"

For this reason it *does* make a difference whether a man is believing in this Christ of the Scriptures, the Christ of authority, the Christ of grace and forgiveness and of judgment.

II. Those Who Believe in This Christ Ought to Be in Deep Concern for Those Who Do Not

The mother of our sermon was grieved over her daughter. Her righteous soul was troubled within her lest what has happened to so many thousands of Christian disciples should happen to her also, that her faith in this Christ of the Scriptures should be broken, and falling away from the Only Savior, her daughter should perish. That this is no ignorant or prejudiced concern is shown by the passage that I take for the text. In that letter St. Paul, the great mind and the great heart of Christianity, is showing how men are saved, not by what they do or say or think, but by their faith in the death of Christ. Having shown that so conclusively, he heaves a sigh, as it were, when he thinks of his own people, for if that is the only way in which men can be saved then many of his own race, the Jews, were not saved, could not be saved. They scorned and rejected Jesus Christ. It was when he thought upon that that he cried out—and it is forever memorable that this expression of anguish of soul comes after what

is, I suppose, the greatest expression of the Christian's joy and victory and bliss and hope, the passage where he says, that neither death nor life shall separate the Christian from Christ and the love of God —it was after that note of triumph that he cried out, "I say the truth in Christ. I lie not, my conscience bearing witness with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing pain in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren's sake, my kinsmen according to the flesh."

The theory that it makes no difference what a man believes as to Christ, that God is good, and no matter what decision a man makes or what way he takes, it will come out all right with him in the end, that any wild, weird, perverse teaching that uses Christian names and talks about God and prayer and heaven will do as well as the Way of Life as we have it in the Scriptures—all that with which Christianity today is clogged and choked and hampered and hindered—certainly does not get its inspiration from the great apostle, who could say that he was in constant pain about his friends and relatives and fellow-countrymen who had rejected Jesus Christ.

If he was anxious about the Galatians and the Romans and the Spaniards, fearing lest they should perish without the knowledge of Christ, still more was he anxious about his own people. Our patriot-

ism and our family affections and friendship ought to intensify our religious faith and quicken our religious activity.

If more ministers were like Paul, and if more mothers and fathers were like the one with whom I started in this sermon, we should see more people converted and our churches rejoicing with God's blessing. While we receive as confessing Christians in the church the great scheme of redemption and pray about it and sing about it, our everyday life, and thinking, too, often denies it, and the only reasonable inference that men would get from us is the conviction that we ourselves do not really believe that it makes much difference, in time or in eternity, whether a man is a believer in Christ or not.

"I saw great tumult in the woods, but I knew not what it was."

2 SAMUEL 18: 29.

XX. *"If I had my life to live over again"*

CROSSING the Allegheny River recently, I paused in the middle of the bridge and leaned over the parapet, watching the interesting scene which was displayed before me: the sun setting beyond the steep hills, the smoke rising from engines and factories, the steamboats pushing their barges up or down the river, the house-boats clustering along the banks of the river, and the river itself flowing rapidly away like the river of a man's life. As I stood gazing down the river, with the stream of humanity passing behind me, I suddenly heard a voice say: "If I had my life to live over again—" I turned quickly to get the rest of the sentence and to see who the speaker was. He was a man well advanced in years, and had reached that period of life when men are governed more by memory than by hope. But, in spite of my keenest attention, the conclusion to his sentence was lost

in the roar of the traffic. I thought of hurrying after him and asking what the end of the sentence was. But, failing to do that, I asked myself: What was there in the man's life that he would have changed? What things did he miss which he would secure if he had his life to live over again? What things done that he would not have done? What things left undone that he would have done? The earnestness of his tone and the gravity of his demeanor convinced me that the man was taking now a very serious view of life, and that he was able, looking back over the years that he had lived, to see many things which he would do differently if he had his life to live over again. And from wondering about this man, I fell to wondering about life itself: What are the things which, from the vantage point of life's sunset, would appear of little worth and value, and what are those which would stand out with a sacred significance?

Lord Byron, once asked what he would change in his life if he had it to live all over again, replied, "Nothing; unless not to have lived at all!" But with him the great majority of men find themselves in complete disagreement. They would not share his satire about life when he said that the only thing he would change would be not to have lived at all. In spite of their mistakes, blunders, and failures, the great number of men are able to discern that life has

great and solemn and beautiful meaning, no matter how they themselves have failed to appreciate the meaning. Nor would the great number of men be so bold as to confess that there was nothing they would change if they could start life again. Most of us are conscious of a great many things which now we would not do; things lightly regarded which now we would carefully esteem; things earnestly sought after which now we would disown and reject. On the tomb of the Infanta Sophia, in Westminster Abbey, are graven these words:

"When the archangel's trump shall blow
And souls to bodies join,
Millions will wish their lives below
Had been as short as thine."

If this is true, it is indeed startling and arresting, for it tells of the possibility of making a complete failure of life. Christ teaches that life ends with a sentence, "Well done, or poorly done." Let us try, then, to follow this man whom I lost in the mist on the bridge and imagine the conclusion of his sentence.

I

If a man had his life to live over again, provided he could commence that life again with the wisdom gained in his first life, he would live more earnestly and recognize more carefully the great moral pur-

poses of life. He would live in the light of the fact that life is a trial and a probation, where moral qualities are to be developed and exercised with a view to their coronation in the life which is to come.

The words of the text were spoken by the runner, Ahimaaz, who brought tidings from the wood of Ephraim, where the rebel Absalom had been slain in battle by Joab. When his grim work was done, Joab thought of the father and king, David, and his last orders to Joab, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom." Who now should break the news to David that Absalom was dead, with three darts through his heart, buried in a pit and covered with a heap of stones? A friend of the king, Ahimaaz, who apparently did not know what had happened, asked permission to run with the tidings. He probably knew that a victory had been won, but not that Absalom was slain. Joab refused to let him run, and sent Cushi, a professional Ethiopian runner. But Ahimaaz was persistent, and again besought Joab to let him run. Joab reminded him that he had nothing to tell. But because of his urgency and importunity, he gave his consent and let him run also. The Ethiopian had taken the way of the hills; but Ahimaaz, more familiar with the country, chose the way of the plains and did outrun Cushi. David was still sitting in the place by the gate where his men had last seen

him as they marched out to battle. From his lofty station on the tower, the watchman made out the figures of the two runners as they sped toward the city. When the watchman ventured that the first runner was Ahimaaz, David was glad, and said with evident relief, "He is a good man and cometh with good tidings." In a moment the panting runner fell at the feet of the king and exclaimed, "All is well." He spoke of victory, the issue of the battle, but David was thinking of something else. "Is it well with the young man, Absalom?" The only answer Ahimaaz could make was, "I saw a great tumult, but knew not what it was." In another moment the dusky Cushite came running to the gate. He, too, spoke of victory. "Tidings, my lord, the king, for the Lord hath avenged thee this day of all those that rose up against thee." But vengeance on his foes was the last thought of David's heart now. What he wanted to know was whether that vengeance, in choosing its victim, had permitted him who was most guilty to survive. Is it well with the young man, Absalom? The Cushite, without a moment's hesitation, said bluntly, "The enemies of my lord, the king, and all those that rise up against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is." For David that tidings was the farewell to hope. His occupation was gone. Wrapping his mantle about him, he went up to the chamber over the gate, and

as he went he said: "Oh! my son Absalom. My son, my son, Absalom! Would God I had died for thee. Oh! Absalom, my son, my son!"

We leave David to his grief and turn to the message of the first runner. "I saw a great tumult in the woods, but knew not what it was." The runner's empty answer is a description of the answer that many who pass through this world would have to render, if one should suddenly ask them the tidings of life, its meaning, its purpose, its final value. About all they could say would be, "I saw a great tumult in the wood, plenty of action and noise and numerous actors; much strife and confusion with some pleasant harmonies interspersed; everybody seeking for something and everybody seeming to miss what he was after; some drawing a lucky number, and some an unlucky number in life's lottery. You ask me what it means? It does not mean anything at all. Yet I joined in the tumult, for I was born into it, and I contributed my share of the noise and shouting and striving. Time, I know, will take me out of it, this whirl of life, and it will have to go on without me; but there will be others to take my place, and others after them to take their places. Now I hear the tumult's roaring sound, but that will soon be followed by a deep and unbroken silence."

If this nameless man whom I lost on the bridge had passed through life as if it were just a great

tumult, I am sure that, did he have an opportunity to pass through it again, he would live more carefully and more earnestly, seeking to recognize its high moral objective. He would do less drifting and more planning and more thinking. Robert Burns, in a brief account of his youth, attributes much of the sorrow and distress of his life to the lack of a high governing purpose: "The great misfortune of my life was to want an aim."

A man can't be everything, therefore let him plan to be something. At a dinner recently, where a number of professional men and business men were met together, I heard them discussing whether or not they would advise their sons to follow them in their profession. None of them, so far as I could tell, would do so, and the ground was that their calling, or work, or profession had peculiar handicaps and difficulties. But if you are going to look for difficulties you will find them in every calling in life. There is no easy and royal way. But in every work and in every calling man can so live that he will recognize the high things of life and make of his life a true success.

II

If man had his life to live over again, he would give more attention to friendship and personal relations and affection, and less to fame, money, and

power. I know nothing about this man or his past, whether he was one of those who totally neglected such things, or whether he honored them and rejoiced in them. But even if he had been one of those who honored and rejoiced in the friendship of life, I am sure, did he have his life to live over again, he would give those things an even higher place. John Randolph of Virginia was one of the greatest men produced by the Old Dominion, a brilliant, and in many respects, a wonderful man. Nothing in American history is more pathetic than the death of Randolph in the hotel in Philadelphia, where he compelled his physician to remain with him up to the very end, because the Virginia law required that when a man manumitted his slave, those who witnessed the will had to be present at his death. Therefore he had the servants lock the door and the physician had to remain with him until the end. Thus did Randolph, recognizing the injustice of slavery, make sure that his own slaves should be freed and well provided for. But together with these noble characteristics, he had a bitter, cantankerous, vindictive spirit and tongue. Men found it difficult to live with him. What could be more touching than Randolph's own account of himself, mounting his horse and sitting for half an hour motionless, trying to make up his mind where to go or with whom to speak. His great plantation, his

well-stocked library, his eminent public services, what were all these when what the heart longed for was friendship and the human touch.

Another great character in American history was that man of storm and thunder, Andrew Jackson. Perhaps no man in American history ever received so much adulation and so much execration and malediction. When at length he retired to the Hermitage near Nashville to end his days, he had back of him the memory of the great victory over Wellington's veterans at New Orleans and his two terms as President of the United States. Yet, in those sunset days at the Hermitage, these were not the things of which he was thinking, nor were they the things in which he found any comfort or consolation. Visitors at the Hermitage who entered his room relate how they would find the old man sitting before the fire, in one hand his Bible and in the other hand a miniature of his beloved Rachel. On her tomb, near the Hermitage, on a bright spring morning, with the trees white with blossoms and the mocking birds singing in their branches, I read the inscription which Jackson composed, his beautiful tribute to the companion of thirty-five years. "Here lie the remains of Mrs. Rachel Jackson, wife of President Jackson, who died the Twenty-second of December, 1828. Age 61 years. Her face was fair, her person pleasing, her temper amiable, her heart kind. A being so gentle

and so virtuous, slander might wound but could not dishonor. Even death when he bore her from the arms of her husband, could but transport her to the bosom of her God."

What the old warrior took comfort in was not the huzzas of the multitude after his marvelous victory at New Orleans, nor the recollections of his eight years of absolute power at Washington; but rather the affections and devotions of his beloved Rachel. There, in the realm of the heart, and not in the realm of things, are to be found the abiding satisfactions of life.

"Oh, what a little time have we
To gentle be, and kind,
E'er we must mingle with the vagrant wind,
The sleeping sea.
Then, seeking, shall we ever find,
I you, you me?"

III

If a man had his life to live over again, he would put Jesus Christ first, whom to know aright is life eternal. This would be true, not only of the man who has lived in complete indifference to Christ or in bold unbelief, but also of the man who has lived a truly religious life. From the vantage point of the sunset, the worth of religion would stand out all the more prominently dwarfing all other pursuits and considerations. Those words which speak to us

with such music from the last pages of Ecclesiastes are the words of one who would have lived his life over again had it been possible, and who speaks to those who still have their life to live, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." He wrote of life as he had seen it, perhaps as he had lived it, "Vanity of vanities." But that was his comment on the pleasures, the gains, the wealth, the beauty and fame of life, not upon its relationship to God after his long and varied experiment with life. He tells us that the one great thing is to remember our Creator. He who does that never writes after life "Vanity of vanities." Rather is his comment that of the great apostle, who said, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable; always abounding in the work of the Lord; for as much as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." No, not in vain; in the Lord, and for the Lord!

The old warrior of the Hermitage, of whom I have just written, would oft be found sitting before the fire, in one hand the miniature of his wife, his tribute to affection, in the other hand the Bible, his tribute to faith and to eternal life. The open Bible, and what it stood for, God, the soul, life everlasting, was a symbol of the abiding reality of life. Politics, military glory, social relationship, all that had fallen from him. Now was left the Word of God. Here

was the Book which told him to seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. Now in the sunset hours the old man discovered how true that is. Life has passed; the world was fading. Now, for him, it is the Kingdom of God or nothing.

We have been following an impossible supposition. No man ever had his life to live over again. It is appointed unto men once to live, once to die, and after that, the judgment. The man whom I heard speaking on the bridge, "If I had my life to live over again," emphasized the "if." That "if" is relentless and inexorable, for neither to that man soon lost in the midst of the bridge, nor to any other man, is it given to live life over again. In view of this fact, there are two final observations:

1. Live carefully, earnestly, remembering that you pass this way never again, even the hour of this Sabbath evening devoted to the highest interests of your soul, because you will never pass through this hour of time again. You may wish afterward that you had done differently, had spoken other words, had taken another course, but that will be forever impossible. We pass this way but once.

2. Do not spend time in vain regret over the past. When the brethren of Joseph, who had used him so cruelly and who had been responsible for his tragic experiences in Egypt, besought him to forgive them and not to wreak his vengeance upon them, Joseph

said, "As for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good." It was a sublime recognition of the fact that our times are in the hand of God, that although we may choose our path the Lord directs our steps. The true and Christian consolation is not in a vain regret over yesterday, if it had blunders or mistakes, nor in a vain effort to amend it or change it or cancel it, but to accept it as a part of the discipline and probation of mortal life, in full faith that through repentance and love, all things, even the hardest, the darkest, the most difficult, the most painful, will work together for good. In the grand eternal plan God makes no mistakes.

"He writes in characters too grand
For our short sight to understand,
We catch but broken strokes, and try
To fathom all the mystery
Of withered hope, of death, of life;
The endless woe, the useless strife.
But there, in larger, clearer sight
We shall see this—His way was right."

The great end of life for you is Christ, for in him is eternal life. Faith is at once life's treasure, life's goal, and life's victory. Whatever hurt or harm or loss has come to you thus far in life, the great thing is still possible. Oh, do not miss that! Do not miss that! Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found. Call ye upon him when he is near.

"But now it has come upon thee and thou faintest; it toucheth thee and thou art troubled." Job 4: 5.

XXI. *Religion and trouble*

THIS is a time when a man either turns to religion or turns against it." So spoke a business man who recently came in to see me and had been telling me of the difficulties and anxieties through which he was passing.

When trouble comes, some turn to religion; that is, it increases and deepens their faith. The winds of adversity only drive them the nearer to God. But others seem to turn away from religion. If they have been going to church, now they stop going and dissociate themselves from public worship and from Christian activity; and others again not only turn away from religion and neglect it, but turn against it. Thus there was profound truth in what this business man said to me, that this is a time when a man either turns to religion or turns against it.

The Book of Job is still the incomparable classic on this great subject, suffering and life. Life is

always thrusting this question upon us, for whether we desire it to be otherwise or not, man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. Without trouble, "life would be like a Dead Sea, a sea of bliss in which one could float, but neither swim nor explore." Yet the fact of adversity and trouble always raises difficult questions when we think upon God and his dominion over our lives. "When I think upon God," said the Psalmist, "I am troubled."

The Book of Job is a very old book, one of the oldest in the world; but you cannot hurt its reputation by saying it is old, any more than you can hurt the reputation of a rock or a tree by saying that it is old. Some of the greatest things of the world will always be the oldest. Here in this book, as Carlyle put it in his *Heroes and Hero Worship,* is "sublime sorrow, sublime reconciliation, oldest choral melody as of the heart of mankind, so soft and great; as the summer midnight, as the world with its seas and stars."

From the pinnacle of prosperity, Job had suddenly been hurled into the deepest valley of adversity. One calamity after another had broken over him, and when possessions and family and health have all been stripped from him, we see the desolate patriarch sitting upon the ash heap and cursing the day he was born. Job, indeed, did not curse God nor charge him foolishly. But he did curse the day

he was born and lamented his existence. But he discovered, as we all do when life hurts, that to curse the day of our birth and to lament existence effects no change and accomplishes no good. The date of our birth cannot thus be expunged from the calendar; life is here and we must face it.

Job had not lived carelessly or foolishly in a fool's paradise when, as he tells us, his steps were washed in butter and the sun of prosperity was in the mid-heavens. He was not unmindful of the fact of the instability and uncertainty of all earthly things, for he says, "I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came." And when trouble did come and the storm broke over him, in spite of all his preparation and contemplation, Job is shaken by the successive calamities which seem to mock at all his preparation and go beyond all his apprehensions. There is a popular saying, spoken with the purpose of keeping people from undue anxiety, that the things we contemplate seldom happen, and the things that happen we seldom contemplate. But this is only a half truth. Sometimes the very things which we have contemplated, and perhaps dreaded, come to pass. So it seems to have been with Job, and when the storm is over we behold this God-fearing and right-living man, deluged with a wave of misery, not abandoning his faith, it is true, but getting no comfort and little hope out of it.

In his day of trouble Job had true and faithful friends, and these three friends came and sat with him on his ash heap. Whatever mistakes they made in their theology and in their efforts to justify the ways of God to Job, their intent and purpose was true and honorable. After seven days of sympathetic silence, which is sometimes the deepest ministry of sympathy, Eliphaz breaks the silence with his speech. With true oriental grace and courtesy, he introduces his remarks by saying, "If we assay to commune with thee, wilt thou be grieved? But who can withhold himself from speaking?" With that for an introduction, he commences by reminding Job of his former faith and his godly life, and expresses astonishment that a man with such a record should now be so upset and staggered by his adversity. He reminds Job how often he had helped and steadied others when adversity came, and they were tempted to rebel against God and all his ways. "Behold thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees." Eliphaz appeals from Job in adversity to Job in prosperity. "You are the man," he says, "once noted for faith, and you are able to strengthen others in the time of trial. But now you do not seem to be able to take the cure which you prescribed for others. But now it has come upon

thee, and thou faintest. It toucheth thee, and thou art troubled."

What disturbed and perplexed the friends of Job in his hour of trial and trouble is something which still perplexes and disturbs the mind. It is painful to see those who have entertained Christian faith for themselves, and also have given comfort and help to others, without comfort and without courage or hope in the time of their own trial, and still more painful is it to see men actually abandon religion or turn against it.

How shall we account for this lack of strength and courage in the day of trouble. In part, no doubt, it is due to the lack of definite instruction in Christian truth. "Prophesy unto us smooth things" is still the popular request and counsel to those who proclaim the great truths of religion. So we have the reign and sway of what is merely entertaining in religion. I frequently receive invitations to deliver what is called an "inspirational" address at some meeting. Inspiration is good, and we all need to have the gift that is in us stirred up and to be urged on toward the great goal. But in straits of life, what the soul must rely upon is Christian knowledge of great granite facts and truths. It is the neglect of those fundamental facts and truths which leaves so many people without spiritual resource or

reserves upon which they can call in the day of trouble.

It may not be a smooth thing to say, but it is said over and over again in the Scriptures, that adversity and trial are a part of this earthly experience. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. There is not a sentence in the New Testament which would lead one into the great error of thinking that his life as a Christian is to be free from trouble and from temptation, and temptation to doubt both the love of God and the reality of the Christian faith. On the contrary, we are told repeatedly to expect testing, trial, loss, and tribulation. "In this world ye shall have tribulation." If this fact were clearly stamped upon our minds then we should not be in a panic and ready to abandon our faith when trouble comes.

Not only is the uncertainty and instability of all things earthly taught by our faith, and not only the fact of tribulation and sorrow, but the spiritual and moral purpose of it all. The grand proposition of Christian faith is that our life here is not an end in itself, but a probation, and that the purpose of this probation is not to give us a good time, not to make us lie down in a meadow of flowers and ease, but to produce and develop moral and spiritual qualities with a view to their complete expression and their full reward in a future life. This is the only key which fits the lock of life's experience. Every

other key has been tried and has failed. But if this is so, that life is a trial system with this great purpose back of it, then none can say that life is not well adapted for such an end.

When the Psalmist was brooding over his own troubles and wondering how it fared so ill with him, when others who did not obey God, indeed, gave him no place at all in their lives, basked in prosperity and rejoiced in success, he comforts himself with the reflection that the things which have happened to him, painful though they are, are bringing him nearer to God; whereas, the unbroken prosperity of other men leads them to forget God. "Because they have no changes, they fear not God." That is, without any reverses, without any changes, or overturnings in fortune, man would hardly believe in God. The only God he would need would be himself, and the only heaven this life. If you and I, then, when things go wrong, as we say, and life sometimes hurts rather than delights, would only remember this, that the great purpose of life, moral and spiritual character, and the way that purpose is fulfilled through trouble and trial, it could never be said of us, that in the time of trouble we turned away from religion, or, what is worse, turned against it. "Tribulation," said one of the most tried and troubled of men, "tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not

ashamed." All things work together for good to them that love God. But the trouble is that we are so often unwilling to admit that moral and spiritual good is the supreme and abiding good. Instead of that, the health or position or friendship or affection or money we have lost bulks so large that it shuts out from our eyes the nobler and grander proportions of those things which nourish and adorn the soul.

The most wretched and unhappy of men is he who has turned against religion. The very energy with which such a person gives expression to the revolt and unbelief in his heart is a witness to the deep unrest and unhappiness of his life. Newman, after reading one of the brilliant and anti-Christian writings of Voltaire, made this comment, "Plausible and terrible." So far as an argument goes, the man who is sorely afflicted may find something plausible about a theory of life without God. In his own experience he can point to so many things which appear to crush and overwhelm what he has believed. But always a theory of life without God, a theory of trouble and adversity without great spiritual purposes running through it, is terrible; and to avoid that terrible state, we must keep in mind the great purposes running through life, and also the great possessions of life, that a man's life consisteth not of the abundance of things which he possesseth.

Not only for our own sake, but for the example we set, and for the sake of others, those of us who confess to a faith in God and in Christ dare not speak and act when trouble comes, as if that faith made not the slightest difference in the world. Where would the world be today, where would the church be today, if when trouble came upon them, those great souls of the past, prophets, apostles, and martyrs, had turned against their God and against their faith. Instead of that, they made the adverse winds drive them nearer to the shores of faith and hope. They were able to say, "Troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed."

In time Job was given deliverance out of all his troubles, although the path was not that which he mapped out for himself, or which was mapped out for him by his well-meaning but often mistaken friends. During the storm, Job holds on to God. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him," is his only creed. But at length God himself speaks. Job is permitted to behold the majesty and the goodness of God, and in that vision his thought, which hitherto had centered on himself and his vicissitudes, is transferred to God. Up to this time he had wanted to argue and dispute with God, but now all that he wants to do is to repent, to worship, and to believe.

"I have heard of thee with the hearing of the ear, but now mine eyes seeth thee; wherefore, I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." Hitherto his faith had been dependent upon the incidents of his own life. When the sun of prosperity shone upon him, the thermometer of his faith stood high; but when adversity came, it sank to the lowest depths. But now his faith is based not upon his own life or its incidents, but upon God. Instead of standing on its apex, the pyramid of his faith now stands upon its true, broad, and grand base, the infinite power and wisdom and love of God. Job has got free of the world, and nothing which might happen to him now could shake the tower of his faith.

This is a day for Christian men to show the faith that is in them. To a world whose stock of faith is exceedingly low, what could have a worse effect than the spectacle of Christian men giving up the Church, absenting themselves from divine service, or becoming bitter toward religion because of the difficulties through which they are passing, and worst of all, because they have lost that which Christ and the Scriptures tell us is of all things least valuable—money. One of the most noted of writers on industrial and financial conditions has recently said that the prosperity which the country enjoyed for so long a time led people to neglect the Sunday school, the Church, abandon the family altar, and

turn Sunday into a pagan common holiday. Hence, when the change came and men no longer had easy employment or easy money, when employment and profits had both vanished, they had no spiritual resources upon which to fall back.

Two men were once discussing why it is that you cannot see the stars by day. The stars are still there, the distance is not greater by day than by night—why then cannot these mighty lamps be seen by day? One man maintained that they could be seen if one went far enough down in a well. The other denied the proposition, but permitted himself to be lowered into the well. After he had been lowered a certain distance, he was asked if he could see the stars, and said, "No." Still further down, the same question was asked with the same answer. But when he had been lowered to a great depth, then, looking up toward the heavens, he said he was able to see the stars. Go down deep enough into a well and you can see the stars by day. So to those who are willing to co-operate with God, and will for themselves the things which he hath willed for them, the deep well of adversity and trouble is a place whence we can see the stars of the spiritual heavens and know that in all and above all and through all is God, and that God is love.

"When Jesus saw his mother."
JOHN 19: 26.

XXII. *"Since his mother died"*

SINCE his mother died, he is a different sort of man. I had never known him to pray before, but since his mother died, he kneels down and prays every night."

That sentence, spoken to me by a man's wife, lingered long in my memory. Often, hurrying along the street, or in the quiet of the study, it has come back to me, and there has risen before me the picture of that unknown man kneeling in prayer. Since his mother died! Before his mother died, the man never prayed. Not since he had knelt as a little child at his mother's knee in the long, long ago had he prayed. He had been the manager of hotels where the sporting fraternity resorted, and the world and its ways had won him far from prayer. Not the prayers of his own mother, nor the ups and downs that come to all of us in life had taught him to pray. But one day his mother died. Since then the man

prays. Prayer now seems to be the most natural and most sacred thing that he can do.

What was the secret of the change? What made him pray? Was it a wave of contrition that swept over him as he remembered with keen regret how he had never answered his mother's prayers when she was alive? And now that she was dead, did he hurry to his knees to let his mother in heaven know that on earth her son was praying? Did he suddenly realize in that dread hour all that his mother had meant to him and had been to him—the hours of waiting and watching by his bedside of sickness, the risings at midnight, the late vigils with needle and lamp? Or did he recall with swift pangs of remorse words or deeds of unfilial conduct? Or now that his mother was in the unseen, did it make heaven and God and the life to come seem more real and communication therewith by prayer an easy thing?

All this, and much besides, may have had its part in bringing this man to his knees, so that the guardian angel could carry back to heaven the glad tidings—"Behold, he prays!" The man of prayer existed in that man, as he lies hidden away beneath the breast of every man here tonight, and the death of his mother was the divine whisper, the divine touch which awakened to life the man of prayer within him. God grant that he still prays and that

the holy impulses which sent him to his knees during the first weeks after his mother's death were not permitted to die away, and that the seed which the hand of sorrow had cast into his heart has long since sprung up and brought forth the abundant fruit of repentance and faith.

This incident from life serves to define, as well as can be defined, the sacred and tender emotions which gather round the name of mother and the powerful influences which go forth from a mother's life and a mother's prayers.

In his account of the crucifixion, St. John adds to the pathos of that most moving of all scenes when he relates that as He hung on the Cross, Jesus saw his mother. "When Jesus saw his mother." The last face perhaps on which the fast closing eyes of Jesus looked was the face of his mother. That was the first face into which he had looked when he came into the world to redeem it; it was the last face upon which he looked before he descended into the darkness of death. I sometimes wonder if that is not true of all men. We know this, at least, that the first face we see when we come into the world is the face of our mother. Perhaps it is true also that the last face a man always sees when his soul is about to depart from his body is the face of his mother, not necessarily with the eyes of flesh, but with the eye of memory. When the man has drifted far out

beyond the point where he can give or receive communications from those whom he is leaving behind him on life's fading shore, perhaps it is his mother's face which meets him and cheers him in the last darkness. As we look now into the face of our mother, what are some of the holy things of life that we see reflected there in that face?

I. Sacrificial Love

When Jesus from the cross saw his mother's face, he saw the best illustration that human relationship can give of that great truth of which he himself was the high and utmost expression, self-sacrificing love. Jesus saw the faces of the scowling scribes and Pharisees, the faces of the mocking and jeering and jesting soldiers, the faces of indifferent strangers looking on, perhaps besides the face of John or some of the other disciples, and some of the other women in the distance; but the one face which caught his glance was the face of his mother. And when he thought of that mother and what she had done for him, almost his last ministry before his death was on her behalf, for he said to her, looking to John, "Woman, behold thy son," and to John, "Son, behold thy mother," meaning that henceforth John was to care for Mary as if she were his own mother. No one can take the place of a mother. We can have several children; men marry often more than

one wife, and women often more than one husband; but we can have only one mother.

It is said of heaven that the light thereof is the light of the Lamb. That means, of course, the light and the glory of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. But the great thing in Christ's life was the light of sacrifice, culminating in the great Sacrifice of Calvary. Therefore, we are justified in saying, although it is a secondary truth concerning the life to come, that it will be a life whose light and glory is sacrificial love and service. In some way it will be possible for us to love one another and to minister to one another in that world. In the country churchyard at Stokes Poges, not far from the old yew tree, celebrated in the *Elegy Written in the Country Churchyard,* is the grave of Dorothy Gray, the poet's mother, and upon her tomb is the following inscription:

"In the same pious confidence, beside her friend and sister, here sleep the remains of Dorothy Gray, widow, the careful tender mother of many children, one of whom alone had the misfortune to survive her."

Passing through Lancaster recently, I thought of her two most distinguished citizens, yet men so different in their capacity and characters, James Buchanan, whose beautiful home, Wheatland, is still to be seen, and Thaddeus Stevens, the iron ruler of

Congress during the Civil War, and who is buried in a cemetery where Negroes can be buried, for the reason, as his epitaph declares, that he might bear witness even in his death to those principles which he had advocated through a long life. Somewhere about Lancaster, too, is the grave of his mother who did so much for him when he was a boy in Vermont. As a youth Thaddeus Stevens was feeble and lame, and his mother resolved that he should not be handicapped in the race of life, and with great sacrifice gave him the means of an education. Thinking of what his mother had done for him, Thaddeus Stevens once wrote: "I really think the greatest pleasure of my life resulted from my ability to give my mother a farm of two hundred and fifty acres and an occasional bright gold piece which she loved to deposit in the contributor's box of the Baptist church which she always attended." In his will he established a sum, the income of which was forever to be used to plant each springtime "roses and other cheerful flowers" upon her grave. No doubt, did you visit that grave on one of these spring days, you would find blooming there those "roses and other cheerful flowers."

Thaddeus Stevens showed his appreciation in the ministry of love after his mother was gone, but he showed it in life also. That, after all, is the important thing. How easy it is for us to awaken too

late to an understanding of what our mothers have done for us. Another great character of that iron age of our history, the Civil War, was the Secretary of the Treasury, and afterward the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Salmon P. Chase. In his account of his childhood, he makes reference to his mother's ambitions for him; how, after his father had died, and she was left without means, she struggled and denied herself in order that her boy might go to college. He says: "How little I appreciated her sacrifices, and it is sad to think—tears fill my eyes as I do think—how late comes true appreciation of them. Alas, how inadequately, until the beloved mother who made them has gone beyond the reach of its manifestation."

An officer of the Confederate Army on his way home after the sunset at Appomattox tells in his *Recollections* of how he saw sitting in the seat across from him a frail, withered, hard-worked woman dressed in faded calico and with a sunbonnet on her head. She held by the hand a young man who had lost his sight from a wound received in battle. Not only was the light of the eye quenched, but the light of the mind also was quenched. From her home, away down in Texas, the mother had come to Virginia to take her now sightless and idiotic boy back home. She had sent him forth full of energy and hope and enthusiasm. That was all that the war

returned to her—a sightless idiot. But he was her son. A noble example, that, of the mother's love that many waters cannot quench, neither can the floods drown!

"Over my heart in the days that are flown,
No love like mother love ever has shone,
No other worship abides and endures,
Faithful, unselfish, and patient like yours;
None like a mother can charm away pain
From the sick soul and the world-weary brain,
Slumber's soft calm o'er my heavy lids creep.
Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep."

II. Purity of Heart and Life

A mother has always been the symbol of purity of life. There is no scriptural basis for such an adoration as Roman Catholics give to Mary the mother of Jesus. Yet the great reverence paid to that mother has not been unnatural. There is an element of that doctrine perhaps in every man's heart. The best thing which could happen for many a young man and young woman tonight would be to have flash before them the likeness of their mother's face. In her reminiscences of her mother, Harriet Beecher Stowe tells how in every scene of family joy or sorrow, when their father wished to make an appeal to the hearts of his children which he knew they could not resist, he spoke of their mother. She pays witness also to the saving and

cleansing power of the recollection of that godly mother. "I think it will be the testimony of all her sons that her image stood between them and the temptations of youth as a sacred shield; that the hope of meeting her in heaven has sometimes been the last strand which did not part in hours of fierce temptation; and that the remembrance of her holy life and death was a solemn witness of the truth of religion, which repelled every thought of skepticism and drew back the soul from every wandering to the faith in which she lived and died."

A group of Civil War officers were once celebrating together at a reunion. Each one was to arise and make a speech or tell a story or make other contribution to the evening's entertainment. As the wine flowed more freely, the stories and the jests became salacious and indecent. At length it came the turn of one officer who had been rather quiet and aloof during the evening's jollification. When his name was called, he rose to his feet, and holding his glass aloft, said, "I propose the toast, 'Our mothers!'" At once a hush fell over the ribald group. What had happened? They had seen the face of their mothers. Are your companionships and diversions and friendships of such a nature that you could have your mother there with you? When a man sees the face of his mother, it is the face of modesty, of self-reverence, of purity, that he sees. Because

today thousands of young men and young women have had their thoughts directed to their mothers, the world tomorrow ought to be a better world.

III. Faith in God

In his last letter to Timothy, exhorting him to be strong and courageous, St. Paul speaks of the faith unfeigned that dwelt in his mother, Eunice, and in his grandmother, Lois. "Wherefore," Paul says, "I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also. Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands."

A believing mother is a great inspiration to faith in God. If God were to take all mothers out of the world, would he find faith in the earth? Not much of it, I fear. The chief repositories of faith are mothers. They are the faithful attendants at the altar of prayer. Speaking of one of his aunts, Gray says, "She taught me to pray." Mothers are the ones who teach little children to pray; and still they teach the world to pray. When the books are opened and all the secrets of life are revealed, then only shall we know how much of heaven has been created by the faithful prayers of believing mothers.

Some years ago I met a minister of the Congrega-

tional Church, and we happened to speak of a classmate of his at Yale, one who afterward became a noted minister in the Presbyterian Church. When they were students at Yale a great revival broke out, and many were taking a stand for Christ and the Christian life. This one man appeared to be untouched by the sacred influence; he made no profession of faith and showed no interest in the revival. Long after they had both become ministers, his friend asked him how it was that he had gone into the ministry, especially since he was one of the few students who had not been moved by the revival which swept the college when they were at Yale. His answer was the story of a mother's prayers. He related how he had been greatly affected and moved by the revival, but steeled himself against it, chiefly on the ground that if he yielded and confessed his faith he would likely become a minister. After he left Yale, he went south to Georgia and entered the law office of a noted Southern lawyer. He tried to put out of his mind all thoughts of the Christian life and the Christian ministry, and was well along in his law studies and so highly thought of that his employer proposed to take him abroad for a trip, and then when they returned have him enter his office as his partner.

But one day he received a letter from his father far off in New England telling him that his sister

had died and his mother had died; and how when his mother had died her last request was that he should tell their son that she died praying for his conversion. When he got this letter he went out into the pine forest, and sitting down beneath a tree there, fought his lonely battle. The issue was that he determined to confess his faith in Christ and enter the Christian ministry. He gave up his bright career in the law, returned to the divinity school at Yale, and shortly afterward was ordained as a minister. However, before he had been ordained, there was a baptism to be administered in the little church which he was serving. He had a friend, an ordained minister, come over to take that part of the service which he was not yet licensed to perform. As this old man, his friend and a friend of his father and mother, stood before the parents and their babe, he said: "I am thinking today of a scene long ago. I see a handsome man and a beautiful wife coming up the aisle with their babe in the father's arms. As I prepared to ask the questions and administer the sacrament, the mother handed me a card on which was written the name of the child, the date of his birth, and underneath, 'Given to God and to the Gospel ministry.' That child," he said, "was your minister." Take out of the pulpit tonight all the ministers who are there because they have praying, God-fearing mothers back of them, and who knows how

many of our pulpits would be empty. On the grave of Phillips Brooks' mother is this inscription—

"O woman, great is thy faith. Be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

Sitting in the assembly room of a fashionable hotel not long ago and watching the people of wealth and fashion as they came and went, my attention was drawn to a handsome little boy of seven or eight years of age who was brought by his nurse to say good night to his mother. Taking a cigarette from between her lips and drawing the boy in to her half-naked body, the mother planted an artificial kiss upon the boy's brow, and then said, calling him by name, "Do try, won't you, to be a good boy!" If that boy amounts to something in the world and is a good man and a useful man, above all a man of faith and prayer who can see the invisible, it will be in spite of and not because of that mother whom I saw kiss him in the hotel room. Mothers, mothers, what manner of person ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness! "Oh, that there were such an heart in you that you would fear me and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with you and with your children forever."

There is probably no one over whom some mother has not prayed. That fact invests each life with an everlasting interest. There are many who had

mothers, may have them now, who earnestly prayed for the salvation of their souls. There are some whose mothers died without seeing their prayers answered. But those prayers are still potential with a great blessing. Still for some of you they may avail much. God grant that some of them may be answered. Looking into the face of his mother, may there be at least one who shall come to himself, and after long waiting, it may be far wandering, turn now to his God, his mother's God, and seek his pardoning face and grace.

"Oh, mother, when I think of Thee,
'Tis but a step to Calvary.
Thy gentle hand upon my brow
Is leading me to Jesus now."

"My sin is ever before me."
PSALM 51: 14.

"The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." JOHN 1: 7.

XXIII. *"Can Christ do anything for my sin?"*

IT is not a matter of mere theorizing or intellectual assent to certain facts. It is the struggle of a soul that sinned specifically, and reaches out for Christ as a drowning man does for a life-preserver."

This was the message which came to me from one who had to say with the Psalmist, "My sin is ever before me." Writing on the fact of sin, Emerson says somewhere, "The less we have to do with our sins the better." Commenting on this, John Morley says, "Emerson has little to say of that horrid burden and impediment on the soul which the Churches call sin, and which, by whatever name we call it, is a very real catastrophe in the moral nature of man."

There can be no question as to the nature of this catastrophe. As one volcano here and there, pouring out its lava, is an index to the conditions beneath

the earth's surface, so the tragedies and sorrows of sin which are brought to our attention are only an index to the universal catastrophe which has befallen human nature. The one great calamity is sin. When we see the shadow of sin falling everywhere across human life, we begin to understand what the world needs. It is not more inventions, political constitutions, financial schemes, or secular education, but salvation from sin.

What the particular sin was in this case was not mentioned. Enough to know that it had left its mark, and that its dark fact was ever before this soul. Confronted by its sin, what this soul wanted to know was—Is there anything in Christ and his Gospel which can help me? Can Christ do anything for the wound of my soul? This is the question which Christ delights to hear and which he is mighty to answer.

I. The World Can Do Nothing

Whatever Christ can or cannot do for the soul that has sinned, we can be sure of this, that the world can do nothing for such a soul. Nothing! The world can tempt the soul; it can assure us that sin does not matter; that there are no bad results; that no punishment will follow, and that the forbidden tree is as good to taste as it is to look at. But after the man has consented to the tempter and

the soul has been stained, do you think that the world can do anything to take that stain away or to heal that wound? Where? Whoever found that to be so? Go back to the world, sin-burdened soul, and ask the world to ease your conscience, cleanse your stain, and heal your wound. What will the world do? It will either keep silence, or it will mock you with cold disdain as the Scribes and Pharisees mocked conscience-smitten Judas when he flung down before them the thirty pieces of silver. Go back to the one with whom or against whom you have sinned and ask that person to lift your burden and heal your hurt. The sailor whose ship has been wrecked on the rocks might as well call upon the winds which drove him on those rocks to save him and deliver him.

I remember meeting once on shipboard a man who evidently had some moral tragedy in his past, and who vainly sought to escape from himself and condemning thoughts and meditations by the changing panorama of constant travel. That he had not succeeded was plainly evident, for no one, not even a god, can escape from himself. To the man whose sin is ever before him, the library, the stock exchange, the playing field, the ship or the train, the domestic fireside, or the playhouse have absolutely nothing to say. They cannot minister to the mind diseased with sin, or pluck from the memory a

rooted sorrow, or raze out the written troubles of the brain, or with some sweet oblivious antidote cleanse the stuffed bosom of that which weighs upon the heart.

> "The moving finger writes, and having writ
> Moves on. Nor all your piety nor wit
> Can lure it back to cancel half a line
> Nor all your tears wash out a word of it."

To the soul that has sinned, this is all that the world has to say. What wonder that this person whose words suggest this sermon, realizing that the world which had tempted her to sin, now could do nothing to help, reached out for Christ desperately, as a drowning person reaches out for a life-preserver, or anything or any person within reach. A drowning man reaches out with all the energy and earnestness born of the conviction that this alone will save him. So when the soul comes to know that nothing else can help it, that it is Christ or nothing, that the Cross is the only life-preserver, it reaches out for him and his help. "Simply to Thy Cross I cling."

II. What Christ Does for Sin

Having shown what the world cannot do, now let us see what Christ can do for sin and the sinner. Christ forgives sin. For this great work he came into the world. "This is a faithful saying and

worthy of all acceptation that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners"; and not a few will be willing to add, "of whom I am chief."

In the Cross of Christ sin is condemned and punished. The Cross beyond all else shows what sin is and what sin deserves. God forgives sin, but not in a way which hides the awfulness of sin and the punishment which falls upon it. The message of the Gospel is that on the Cross sin is punished and justice satisfied that man might be forgiven. In the Cross, therefore, and in the sufferings of Christ we have the true estimate of what sin is and what it deserves. If you would know what sin is, and what its punishment is, you must go elsewhere than to the courts of justice and the prisons where the sins of men are punished. You must go elsewhere than to the great masters of literature—Shakespeare, George Eliot, Stevenson—in whose characters there is depicted the habit of sin and the torments of remorse. You must go elsewhere than to saddened homes, whence has fled all the sound of music and mirth. You must go elsewhere than to the secret chambers of thought and imagination in the lives of those men and women who have been made desolate by their own or others' sin. Yes, were such a thing possible, you must go elsewhere than to the dark realm of impenitent and lost souls. To know what sin is and what it deserves, you must go to Calvary,

and stand before the Cross of Jesus Christ, and there, while the earth shakes and the sun veils his face as the Redeemer dies for sin, learn the guilt and the power and the woe of sin.

Were this not so, did man not know that in the Cross the power and guilt of sin is recognized and dealt with, he could have no satisfaction in the remedy of the Cross. A forgiveness which belittles sin, or a forgiveness procured in some cheap and easy way, would give no satisfaction or peace of conscience. Recently I spoke with one who had been inclined to accept the popular teachings of the day which give us a Christianity with the deep seriousness and the grand remedy of the Christ's forgiveness left out. She said that she had now come to see that such a cheap and easy way of forgiveness and life eternal must be false and unworthy.

Until we realize the seriousness of sin, and that it deserves punishment, we are not prepared to receive the forgiveness of the Cross. In his great story of sin, Hawthorne brings this out in a striking manner. When Hester bent over the dying Puritan minister, who had bade her farewell, she said: "Shall we not meet again? Shall we not spend our immortal life together? Surely, surely we have ransomed one another with all this woe. Thou lookest far into eternity with those bright dying eyes. Then tell me what thou seest."

"Hush, Hester, hush," said he with tremulous solemnity; "the law we broke, the sin here so awfully revealed, let these alone be in thy thoughts. I fear! I fear! It may be that when we forgot our God, when we violated our reverence each for the other's soul, it was thenceforth vain to hope that we could meet hereafter in an everlasting and pure reunion. God knows and he is merciful. He hath proved his mercy most of all in my afflictions by giving me this burning torture to bear upon my breast, by sending yonder dark and terrible old man to keep the torture always at red heat, by bringing me hither to die this death of triumphant ignominy before the people. Had either of these agonies been wanting, I had been lost forever. Praise be his name; his will be done. Farewell!"

In that magnificent climax to his great tale Hawthorne showed his wonderful appreciation of the deep things of the human soul. Strong as was his affection for Hester and his desire to be with her in eternity, stronger yet was his sense of his sin and his complete submission to the judgment of God. There are things in human life so deep that nothing can answer them or meet them but the deeps which are in the Cross of Christ.

Because sin is punished on the Cross, God can forgive the sinner. On that sublime platform of Calvary, erected with the agonies of Immanuel for a

foundation, God and man can now meet. Man is reconciled to God; God is reconciled to man. God has remained just, and yet he has forgiven the sinner.

III. The Results of Forgiveness

When the penitent bows at the foot of the Cross, his sin becomes a different thing. In the beautiful memorial window of the Abbey Church at Elstow, the visitor can see in the mystic colors of ecclesiastical glass Christian kneeling at the foot of the Cross, while his dark and heavy burden rolls from his shoulders. Bunyan's immortal picture is as true and brief an answer as can be given to the question "What is the result of forgiveness?" Christian said that he saw it no more—the burden was gone. This will always be true. It does not mean that the memory of transgression will pass, or that its shadow will never fall across our path; but that the sting and shame and pain which constitute its burden are gone. Even the memory of sin repented of will be useful to a man in the future to warn him and guard him from sin. Perhaps that was what the Psalmist meant when, forgiven of his sin which had been ever before him, he said, "With thee there is forgiveness that thou mightest be feared."

Another result of forgiveness is love to Christ. True Christian love flows out of this deep well of

forgiveness. So Christ put it when at the house of Simon he defended and immortalized the woman who washed his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head, "Because she hath been forgiven much, she loved much." Amid all the currents of unbelief and subtle perversion of or denial of Christian faith, there is one person about whom we do not need to be anxious. It is that person in whose heart there wells up an ever fresh fountain of gratitude and love to Christ for his wonderful forgiveness. Whoever else stumbles, he will not; whoever else is carried away by the tides of this world into the fog and darkness of unbelief, he will not. Because he has been forgiven much, therefore he loves much.

A sense of forgiveness, too, is the greatest equipment and qualification for Christian work and discipleship. "The love of Christ constraineth me," said the great apostle who did more than any other for Christ. I suppose a strict exegesis of the first clause, "the love of Christ," would make it not an objective love; that is, the love of Paul for Christ; but rather a possessive love, the love of Christ for Paul. But however that may be, we can count on this, that the love of Paul for Christ is created by and answers to the love of Christ for Paul. Paul knew that Christ loved him and died for him, and that by faith in him his sins were forgiven. You

want to be of some use in the world for Christ and his Church? There is the fountain of it and the secret of it—to know yourself a forgiven soul.

So great is the power of forgiveness that even past sin now can become a minister for Christ. There is an old legend that sometimes when Peter was preaching he would hear the crowing of a cock, and for a moment he would be covered with embarrassment and confusion. Then he would recover himself and preach with a new and more burning zeal and earnestness and tenderness. Goethe brings *Faust* to a conclusion with a beautiful passage in which Margaret, against whom Faust had sinned, meeting him in heaven, asks and receives permission to become the spiritual guide and instructor of Faust in eternal life.

"Incline, O maiden
With mercy laden, in light unfading
Thy gracious countenance upon my bliss.
My loved, my lover,
His trial is over,
In yonder world returns to me in this—

The spirit choir around him singing,
New to himself, he scarce divines
His heritage of new-born being.
Vouchsafe to me that I instruct him.
Still dazzles him the Day's new glare."

Then answers the Mater Gloriosa:

"Rise, thou, to higher spheres! Conduct him,
Who following thee shall follow there."

Yes, the answer of the Gospel to the question with which we started, "Can Christ do anything for my sin?" is immediate, complete, unfaltering, and satisfying. Christ can do everything for my sin. He takes away its pain, removes its burden, and by his precious blood washes out its stain. Whatever else you pass by, do not pass by this truth; whatever else you doubt, doubt not this grand, glorious, and tender fact to which heaven and earth bear witness, the redeemed in Heaven, who about his throne are singing the new song of Moses and the Lamb, and the redeemed on earth, who hope one day by grace to join that everlasting throng and sing that endless song—"The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

COLOPHON

"Sermons from Life" has been set on the linotype in eleven point Old Style Number One, leaded two points. In design, Old Style Number One is of English origin and has the workman-like quality and freedom from "frills" characteristic of English old styles in the period prior to the invention of the "modern" letter. It gives an evenly textured page that may be read with a minimum of fatigue. . . . . The body of this book is printed on Mellotex, seventy pound basis; End Sheets, Brightext, sixty pound basis; Case, Dupont's linen natural finished cloth stamped in gold Brighten leaf.

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